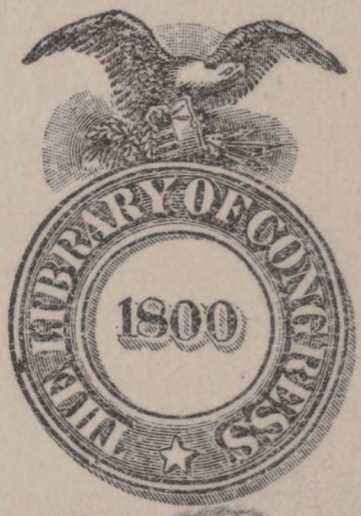

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MY SISTER KITTY

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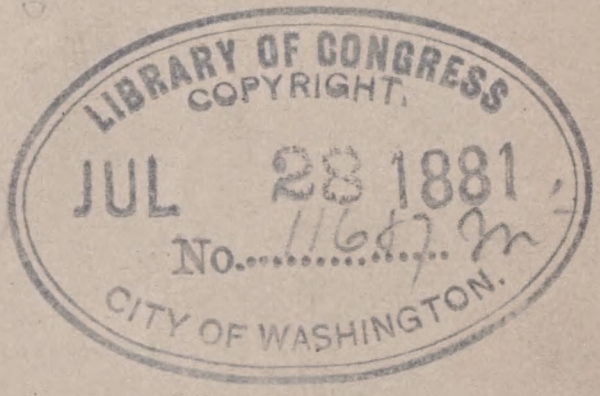
A STORY OF ELECTION DAY

Fanny D. Bates



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MY SISTER KITTY.

A STORY OF ELECTION DAY.

WE were all sitting around the table, in front of a blazing wood-fire, the night before election, when my father came in with more than his usual animation. Drawing a chair close to the fender he sat down, rubbing his hands, and looking very much pleased, though with an air, as "Who shall say that I am elated by such a trifle?"

I longed to know, but waited a moment. *Men are so queer!* They may be dying to tell you a thing; yet the leading question which would open the floodgates of a woman's heart, just tickles their bump of secretiveness, and causes them to fold up,

with a sort of proud consciousness that "Richard is himself again," and knows how to keep a thing or two from the curious. No remark being made, as mother and Kitty were puzzling their brains over some knitting, my father turned round and said,—

"Well, girls, what if they should send your settled-down old father as Representative to Boston, after all!"

"Oh, pa, is there really a prospect?" burst out Kitty and I in a breath, while mother looked up from her work anxiously.

"As far as I can see to-night, there's a pretty good chance; I've been talking with some of the men about it. They came into the office and looked over matters a little, and they all say there isn't a doubt about it. Pelham, you see, is a young man, and talks to the boys, and promises all sorts of things, but the old, steady-going men aren't a-going to vote for him. They all say, 'it ain't the *party* they vote for, it's the *man!*' Slab City 's looking up, lately;—pity it was ever named after the saw-mill business;—but

the water-power 's a good one, and, you see, to send some one who'll make a mark, will be so much gain to the village; it'll bring it into notice. There's Gaylord says he can bring up a dozen of his friends to work for me; he'll do all he can; he's a clever fellow, and knows me. Pelham will work hard, for his heart is set on going, and his brother will do everything for him. If I had a son, now, or somebody who was specially interested for me! People will do a great deal for their own 'kith and kin,'" and my father sighed deeply.

Poor man! if the golden-haired baby, whom, many weary years ago, he laid to sleep under the trees on the hillside, had only lived, he would have had an arm to lean on, and some one young and strong-hearted to work for him. I knew that my mother felt it, for the black pussy cat who stood on the table, looking into her face, turned, with an impatient little purr, to lick off a drop that sparkled on her jetty fur; and there was silence for a moment. Oh,

why am I only a girl! Kitty was the first to break in:

"Oh, father, and shall we all come down and visit you in the winter? What fun it will be! Hope and I will look up some famous beaux, and captivate them entirely; we should so like to '*settle*' in the city. And then, when you are next elected, — for after this honor you will probably be in demand as a *noted public man*, — you and mother can come and board with us. And we won't have anything less than a corner-lot on Commonwealth Avenue, or one of those grand old houses on Beacon Street. *They* would be more convenient for your business, would they not, papa? Oh how grand I shall feel, when people say, 'that young lady in the green silk,' — 'for *green* it shall be,' — 'is the daughter of the Representative from Slab City!'" And Kitty pursed up her pretty mouth, and arched her eyebrows, and looked, — what in fact she was, — a perfect little empress.

It will be their own loss, thought I, if my

beautiful sister, with her distinguished face and air, and the fond, generous heart which lies under her coquettish manner, does not stay to be the crown and blessing of some happy home.

My father smiled. "Yes, you must all come; I shall want to introduce my wife and daughters to all my friends there. I think our old groomsman, Dabney, will be glad to see us, and how he will be astonished at the girls,—such tall young ladies as they have grown, now; they were only about so high when he was here last;" and my father measured off about three feet on the chimney-piece with his hand, and looked up to me as I stood watching him on the other side of the hearth, with such a fond, proud smile, that it brought the tears to my eyes, and I thanked God in my heart that, girl though I was, I could be a source of pride to my father.

"It will take a good deal to get us ready for a winter in the city," said my mother, "it is *so* long since I have had anything really fashionable!"

"Oh, well, mother," said I, "we can manage some way, and now is our time; we *must shine* a little this winter, if we never do again! You really need the change, and Kitty and I shall never be any younger, or prettier. I long to go away, and breathe freer, and see people and things! It's rather frightful, to be sure, but I guess my pride will carry me through, and, after all, it is only the mere *polish* that we are lacking in. Kitty and I have nothing to be ashamed of in our education; we must only keep cool, and take things as if we had been accustomed to them all our lives, supported by the proud consciousness that the Trist family is, after all, of as good stock as any in the country;" and I gave a little suggestive pat to my father's bald place. "Couldn't you manage, pa, to add just an *e* to the name, it would look *altogether more aristocratic*, — *Triste* would really be exceedingly elegant and romantic!"

"No," said my father, drawing himself

up, "if plain John Trist won't speak for itself, all the letters in the alphabet wouldn't alter it, to my mind!"

"I really didn't mean it, pa; you know I only wanted to hear what you would say; but, about the fixings, — do let us talk them over a little, what we should have to get! You, mother, could take those two black satins of grandmother's, and make one splendid dress of them for dinner-parties and grand occasions, — black satin is always *plain* and *elegant;* and, besides, Kate Fields, who has just come from New York, says it is the most stylish thing you can wear. There'll be enough left, probably, of the two dresses for a bonnet, and trimming for another dress, — they trim altogether with satin, you know, — and you can take your old black-silk, take out a couple of breadths for a sacque, gore the rest, make it a short dress, and trim it with the folds of satin, and you have a suit for all occasions. Then you have a merino or two, which furbished up a little, will do for

mornings and extras. Why, mother, I don't see but you're dressed for Boston already!"

Mother laughed. "You're good at planning, Hope, but I don't know; as the old proverb has it, 'You musn't halloo till you are out of the woods.' Your father is not elected yet."

"Oh, but I feel sure that he will be, and, at any rate, we have the pleasure of anticipating. Do let us all be *Representatives* for this night, if no longer. Pussy, how should you like to be a Representative's cat? See, mother, with what a dignified air she waves her tail, when I ask her. Couldn't you afford to give her a little kiss for her brightness?"

"No," said my mother, "I leave that for silly things like you. And now, in view of to-morrow, put her down cellar, and let us all go to bed, for it will be an exciting day, at least!"

So we all kissed good-night, with an unusual tenderness, springing from the new

hopes fluttering in our hearts; but mine felt strangely sad, away down in one corner; and, after I had fastened a pair of scissors into the dining-room window, to secure it, I stood looking out, fascinated by the long, gloomy shadows that lay under the trees, and wondering why it was that the shadow of a fear must cling so closely around that which is dearest in our lives. But, as I turned away, a little moonbeam danced in, and fell upon the dark wall, on the other side of the room, and the thought came to me that, perhaps, the fear was only the dark background, to make our happiness shine more brightly; and I said, half to myself, and half to the moonbeam, "Shine away, little moonbeam, and thank the dark shadows; nobody would notice you in the daytime!"

"What's that, my dear?" said my father, coming in to re-light his candle at the fire.

"Nothing, papa, only I was thinking that if there were never any night, all the moonbeams and stars and bright little things

would never have a chance to show themselves!"

"Very true, my dear, night is certainly a great institution, especially when you've worked hard all day; but they used to tell me when I was young that all the *beauty-sleep* came before midnight; so you'd better be off, my dear, and leave the 'stars and bright little things'—as you call 'em—to take their turn: not that you need it, though;" and he looked admiringly in my plain face, and gave me another good-night kiss; and the kiss, or the moonbeams, or both together, made the way up-stairs very bright, and the shadows were all fled away. That night Kitty and I lay long awake, talking over the wonderful new silk that we each meant to indulge in; the '*loves of bonnets*' we would concoct; whom we should see, and send cards to; and all the visions of beauty and gladness that would dawn upon us in that happy future. And, after the gentle breathing at my side grew deeper and deeper, I lay and thought how my noble,

hard-working father would be honored and appreciated by those whom he met, how the change would brighten my mother's pale cheek, and how her heart would treasure the tribute paid to my father's abilities by those who were proud to honor honest merit; and, remembering the promise given to all, I thought it not unseemly to pray, that He, who knows the trials and disappointments of our daily lives, and the wants and weakness of his children, pitying them, — even as a Father, — would give us this pleasant thing!

Visions of presidents and courts and festive scenes flashed through my dreams; and, withal, my sister Kitty, in her long, trailing, new silk, supported on either side by an admiring crowd; but, as the night wore on, they seemed to fade away, and I was simply a very sleepy individual when the first bell rang, and much inclined to turn over for another nap, when my sister inquired, in a penetrating voice, from over the footboard, whether I deemed such sloth

becoming the daughter of the future Representative of Slab City. Then, the possible glories of the future flashed upon me, and, jumping up, it was some minutes before I could find breath to sigh out, "O Kitty! one whole day of suspense; what shall we do?"

"Do! why, we must fly down to the Green on all the errands that we can think of, and bow to all the men, and make ourselves as fascinating as possible, so as to get votes for pa. That is the only way we have, of electioneering, and, of course, we must do something. Many women do more for less cause. O Hope! if we go to Boston, we shall be sure to see Herbert Clay; he is in Harvard, now, and I suppose has grown to be such a fine young man. I wonder if he remembers all the nice times we used to have together when he was here, chestnutting, trouting, and all; he was a glorious fellow, and will never be too proud to know us, I'm sure. How glad we shall be to see him, and how very odd that you never thought of him before; I shall cer-

tainly tell him of your faithlessness, — *such cronies* as you were, too! Shall you ever forget what gloriously fair hair he had? it was like the purest gold!"

I had thought of the fair hair before, but did not say as much to my chatty sister. I remembered how, the morning he went away (it was just as the sun was rising), we stood out by the gate together, waiting for the stage. The first birds were singing, and the dew lay wet and cold on the roses that hung over the fence. Just then the first bright sunbeam stole over the mountain and fell upon his hair. I started, — it was so bright and sudden, — and he said:

"What is it, Hope?"

"Only a little sunbeam, Herbert, which falls upon your forehead like a crown. I shall take it for a sign."

"Why, little one, would you have me a king, or president, when I come back?"

"Yes, Herbert, a king above all others; such an one as we were reading about the other day; so much *truer*, and *better*,

and *stronger* than other men, that you will be able to lead them all."

"For *your sake*, I will try, Hope," said he.

"O Herbert! if I were an elegant, commanding woman, who could inspire men to heroic deeds, like the women of History, instead of being a little, unsophisticated country girl! No, no, you must do it, because it is a great and glorious thing to be a man, and you have —"

"'When you wear the bonnet red and the beautiful cockade,
Ah! I fear you'll be forgetting all the promises you've made,'"

merrily sang my sister Kitty, skipping down the walk.

"You see, Herbert, I'm thinking what a fine, grown-up young man you'll be when next we meet, probably utterly oblivious of the fact that you ever beau-ed us round up here in the country; but, dear me, is that the stage already? I've almost killed myself, besides upsetting a pitcher

or two, hurrying to get dressed, before it came. Why didn't you call me, Hope?"

"I did speak to you, Kitty," I said, with a twinge of conscience, remembering that it was *very softly*, for I wanted a word before she appeared.

"Well, you should have pulled me up directly, and impressed it upon me that Herbert was going, for I was too sleepy to think; but, dear me, they're waiting. How we shall miss you, Herbert!"

A moment more, and he was gone, and we leaned over the gate to catch the last wave of the handkerchief from the top of the stage. Then the morning mists rolled between; it felt very chilly, and we went into the house.

"Well, Hope, what are you dreaming of, now?" said Kitty, in a long-suffering voice. "You haven't spoken a word for the last fifteen minutes; the breakfast-bell has rung, and here you are, not *half dressed*; I've waited patiently to see if you wouldn't wake up. You were so excited

last night, and now nothing seems to rouse you!"

"Oh, you run down, Kitty, and tell them I'm coming, that's a dear; I'll be there in a minute, and eclipse you all in brightness;" and I gave her a little push out of the room.

Breakfast was rather a silent meal this morning. My father looked pre-occupied, my mother, a little weary; I think they had talked matters over after they went to bed, for I had heard a low murmur from below until quite late. Kitty and I indulged in a few pleasantries, but were glad, on the whole, when it was over, and we had seated ourselves to our work.

"How I do hate to piece things," broke out Kitty, after we had been sewing for about five minutes; "the under part of this sleeve is *really disgraceful*. When I get my rich man, Hope, I'll never piece any more, or wear anything but high boots, or long gloves. Oh, how nice it will be! I don't think I feel like sewing to-day, either.

Don't you want anything down town, mother?"

"Yes, if your father is going down, I don't know but you might as well go along with him, and get some raisins for a pudding. I suppose you will have some one up to dinner, won't you, husband?"

"Yes, perhaps one or two; those who come in from the parishes, and stay all day."

"Oh, do, father," said I, "have them all who vote for you; we'll take care of them."

He smiled, and nodded, and tucking Kitty under his arm, I watched them go down the street together, followed by old Ponto, who trotted along in an orthodox manner at their heels. Mother came and sat down by me for a moment.

"I really think, Hope, that the chances are quite favorable!"

That was a good deal for my mother to say; she looked so pleased, too.

"Oh, mother, *I'm sure!*"

"Yes, my dear, you usually are."

"No, but really, mother, when you think of father, compared to these other men, does it seem as if the *mere party feeling could* triumph? Will not all the sensible ones vote for him?"

Mother shook her head. "Your father is too straightforward and honest to be popular, and the dash and show of Young America is very captivating; but we won't worry, it will all turn out for the best. And, now, suppose you look and see if the parlor is all right, and, as soon as Kitty comes back, make the dessert, and I will run and put on a cap, for your father may bring some one up at any time."

Kitty came in presently, to tell us to set the table for five extra (I almost kissed the knives and forks)! She reported that the Green and sidewalks were full of men, talking earnestly in knots. One had said, as she passed, "The squire, I can tell you, ain't a-going to be put down by nobody; he's a good man, an' everybody knows it that knows anything. Many's the time he

has helped me out o' trouble, an I'll be blamed if I don't stan' up for him all I can!" Kitty said she stopped and looked at him, that she might know him again; and one of the men touched him on the shoulder, and said, "Hist, Bellows, there's the squire's daughter!" Then she hurried on, but stopped at the office, and begged father to invite Bellows to dine.

Well, it would have done your heart good to see the big turkey as it came steaming on to the table. I had fed the poor fellow many a day as I sat out on the back door-step, and he came gobbling up, with his beseeching head thrust out. However, he was to feed my father's supporters, and I called to mind, for my consolation, the melancholy fact embodied in a couplet of the little, old Westminster Catechism, to the effect, that —

"Death conquers all,
Both great and small;"

and reflected that it was not every turkey who was called upon to die for election-day.

Bellows was there, and we put him next to Kitty, and four other men, one or two of them rough farmers from the neighboring districts, but with such good, honest faces, and bright, intelligent minds. They did not use the nice napkins that I had laid for them with so much care, or the salt spoons; and the girl who waited on us at table, expressed, in her speaking countenance, such open-mouthed astonishment at some of their ways, that it was only by carefully looking away from Kitty, that I could smother a laugh, the whole thing was so funny; but, then, they were so clever and warm-hearted, and looked up to my father with such admiring reverence, telling wonderful tales of what the "squire" had done, that my heart was completely melted, and I loved them all. Then, after the quivering plum-pudding — my special handiwork — had been duly commented on, my father brought out a bottle of old wine, — the very best of currant, — made by my mother when I was a little baby, and only produced on particular occasions.

"We were young folks, wife, when this was put up," said he, uncorking it with a sort of tender solicitude. "I remember, *just as well!* it was when we lived in that little house in Green Street; how you stood by the kitchen-table, with baby in your arms, — so young and pretty, — watching me as I fastened down the corks. You looked up, as I finished, and said, 'Now, husband, we will put some of this away very carefully, and when baby is grown up, and we get to be old, and live in a fine house, and riches and honors pour in upon us, we'll bring out a bottle, now and then, to carry us back to the old times, when all our treasure was this little home, and a bit of yard, with the row of currant-bushes along the fence, and our own hopeful, loving hearts to make it the happiest place on earth.' They would call us old people, now, I suppose, Jenny, and the baby has grown beyond her mother. We're not as rich as we once thought to be, but we've enough to keep the wolf from the door, and

to leave our girls a little something when we can no longer care for them. Let us drink, first, to those dear old times."

So we drank to the "dear old times," and then Gaylord suggested the health of the representative from Slab City, and Bellows, beaming all over, hitched back his chair from the table, and said "he guessed he must go back to the polls; it wouldn't do to leave things long." So we shook hands all round, and they departed.

"Oh, mother! only half past one o'clock," groaned Kitty, looking up at the venerable timepiece that stood in the corner; "what time does the sun set?"

"Somewhere about five, I believe," said my mother; "but if you are going to sit still and wait for it, the time will seem very long. I think that I shall put on my bonnet, and run over and see Mrs. Jackson, who has been sick for a week, and I advise you and Hope to busy yourselves about something. If your father *should* be elected, we should have to *spring to it* to get things

ready; he would have to have half a dozen new shirts, at least, and you would not have so much time to run about."

After she had gone out, Kitty and I consulted as to what to do with ourselves.

"Make caramels," suggested she.

"No, Kitty; the bare idea, when we are so excited, of patiently standing over the fire, and *stirring!* What are you made of? I feel as if nothing but a vigorous walk would save me from spontaneous combustion."

"Well, then, what do you say to dressing up, and making our call on the new bride?"

"Kitty! The idea of dressing up, and sitting down with simpering little Mrs. Jones, and saying, with a sweet smile, that you suppose she enjoyed her bridal trip; and did she meet many other brides at Niagara? and wasn't it delightful going about those romantic places with some one who so thoroughly understood and appreciated your feelings upon the subject? And then she will blush a little, and say, 'Oh, yes;

that she had never known what it was to be happy before, or to have any one so devoted to her as Mr. Jones had been; and wasn't it strange they all guessed that *she* was a bride? although she had told Mr. Jones, when they started, that she didn't mean that anybody should *suspect* such a thing, she was going to be *so sensible*. Why, she never allowed him to kiss her before any one, except once, when he said, in such a pathetic way, that he *couldn't help it;* and never laid her head on his shoulder, in the cars, unless she was so *very*, *very tired*, you know, when they had been travelling a long time.' And then she'll advise us 'to get *just such* a man as he is, if we only can, but she's afraid he is not to be had;' and we'll smile and bow, as we rise to go, and say, 'We can hardly expect to; but won't she come and see us *very soon?*' and — dear me! Kitty, I'd rather make caramels."

"Why, Hope, how absurd you are! But come, what will you do? I'm not going to propose anything more."

"Well, what if we should go over the river, and take some jelly to our forlorn friend? That will give us a long walk, with a moral termination, and we can go by way of the Green, and see all the people."

So we put on our hats and started, passing with some trouble through the crowds of men collected on the sidewalk, and looking with envious eyes on the little boys sitting on the park fence, listening with great eyes to the overpowering eloquence of the soap man, who, mounted on a table, was displaying his lather to an appreciative crowd; or, better still, those who hung round the steps of the old town-house, watching the men as they went in and out, and listening to their opinions on the chances of the respective candidates. It was, on the whole, a quaint, busy picture that our usually quiet little green presented on this day of days. Every hitching-post in front of the stores, — every tree, was occupied. Here stood an old, broken-down, meek-faced white horse, fastened, with here

and there a bit of rope, to supply the missing strap, to a tumble-down, one-seated buggy wagon, the floor of which, covered with straw, accommodated half a dozen white-headed urchins, who, with their mother, a pale-faced woman, her youngest in her arms, had come to town with pa to do some shopping and have a peep at the great world. There an old bay, with a sort of subdued fire in its eye, stood nosing the post, quiet, though suggesting to a shrewd observer the idea that the deviltry inherent in his disposition had slipped off as far as his hind heels, and there, being stopped by his shoes, lay in a condensed state, ready for occasions.

Further on, a horse of the kind called "calico," drooped its head fondly over the little ragged colt by its side, while, on the seat of the wagon, attached, rested an old, square-nosed dog, guarding his master's property. Occasionally might be seen a lithe, graceful animal, with its smart, shining buggy, bright robe, and long whip; a

sturdy-looking pair of farm-horses, in a long country wagon, or an old, lumbering family carriage, indicative of decayed gentility. On the corner, an auctioneer was holding forth, surrounded by a promiscuous heap of chairs, tables, old stoves, pots, pans, and kettles. Men stood over the bureaus and bedsteads they had bought, in sheer bewilderment as to what they should do with them, and with a kind of uneasy wonder as to what their wives would say, when they appeared with their burdens at home. But then, as everybody said, they were "*so cheap?*" "*actually going for nothing!*"

It was a great day for the dry-goods stores. Calico, cotton cloth, flannel, and tape flowed in an unceasing stream from the yard-measure; a great day for the candy-stores, for every child was sucking a stick of peppermint, or a Jackson ball, or bit of jujube; a perfect harvest-time for the oyster-man, as I knew my father's purse would testify, for I had heard him say in the morning that if the men wanted a lunch

they should have it, and it should be something that should *stand by them*. Every live man felt a little livelier, every merry man a little merrier, and the calculating man sniffed a bargain in every breeze that came to him laden with the odor of election day. The air was keen and bracing, and Kitty and I, once past the sights and sounds, walked briskly on, and were soon at the house of our friend, where, in the warmth of the welcome, and the interest excited by her recital of the list of grievances incident to all mankind, and especially to herself, we quite forgot to watch the declining sun. It was only as we came out of the door that Kitty exclaimed: "Oh, Hope, how the time has passed! We shall hardly have time to get home before the news comes."

Then we hastened on, over the long road, through the green, which was becoming more and more crowded. At the end of the park stood a cannon, and men and boys were busy heaping up the old tar-barrels for bonfires. How my heart thumped

away! The sun was just sinking behind the mountain-top, and the shadows lay long over the frozen ground. We walked on, without a word, and turned the corner, into our own street. A few steps more, and a sudden light gleamed across our path, followed by a deafening roar, which shook the windows of the neighboring houses. I grasped Kitty's arm, and we stopped, unconsciously looking in each other's faces. Another flash, and thunder, and two men came up the path, talking excitedly.

"Oh, Kitty, dare not you ask them?"

"Would you, Hope?"

"Yes, do."

So Kitty made a little step forward.

"Would you tell us, please, who's elected?"

The man looked at her, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Why, old Squire Trist, of course."

Kitty didn't stop to thank him, but with an ecstatic "*Oh!*" ran down the bank, and across the street, and I was fain to do the same. At the back gate stood our man,

Tim, and the cook, her apron over her head, waiting to learn the news.

"Oh, Tim! oh, Hannah! did you know that father was elected?"

"Sure, an' is it so, miss? The Lord be praised," said Hannah, raising her hands devoutly, while Tim's lower jaw dropped a moment, in delighted amazement; then, recovering it, "Hannah, honey, and wud ye mind givin' a bit o' maal to the pigs, till I get back, jist to stop their mouths? I'd like to rin down, and jist give one blast for the square mesel', as becomes a man in me sitivation;" and Tim went jogging down the street, on the speediest trot in which he was ever known to indulge.

We ran into the house. Mother had not returned, but presently came in, smiling as comfortably as if it had all the time been an assured thing.

"Oh, mother, have you heard the news?"

"Well, yes, my dear; I couldn't very well help it; I started as soon as the firing commenced, and half a dozen stopped me on the way over."

"And aren't you *perfectly* happy?"

"Why, Hope, that is saying a good deal."

"Oh, dear, I know it; but I am — I can't help being.'

And Kitty and I hugged each other, and danced round and round, very much to the astonishment of old Ponto, who, disturbed in his nap, crawled out from under the sofa, and added his voice to the chorus.

"Mother," said Kitty, stopping so suddenly that it almost threw me over. "what do you think of an illumination? Isn't it the proper thing for a representative to do? They've never had one in town, and it would please them all so."

"Especially the small boys," said my mother.

"Yes, indeed; they'd never get over it," said Kitty, innocently, not perceiving the drift of my mother's remark; "do you think father would object? I don't believe he would have the heart to, to-day."

"No, my dear; but he will probably be busy this evening, and will not have time to

see about it; and I must make my plans for company that may come to tea, or in the evening."

"Well, but, mother, I know all about fixing the candles, and Hope and I can get on very well, with Tim to help us. He can get the boards. *Do say yes.*"

"Well," said my mother, thoughtfully, "I — don't — know;" which we all knew meant yes. So we ran out through the kitchen to Tim, who was just coming in under the wood-house with his last wheelbarrow-load.

"Tim, Tim, you must come and help us right away. Never mind the wood; we shan't want any more of it, for we're going to Boston, you know, this winter."

"Sure, miss, an' is that so?" said Tim, good-naturedly, setting down his load; "an' will I be afther leavin' the wheelbarrer here till the spring?"

"No, no, Tim; but I mean that we want you just now, in a great hurry. Bring one or two pieces of board, as long as the win-

dows are wide (which is about a yard), into the sitting-room, and I'll tell you what we want of them. Now, Kitty, as to the candles; how many are there in the box in the closet?"

"What, mother's best spermaceti ones, Hope? Why, mother, may we use those?" coming into the dining-room where she was. "Why, yes, to be sure we must; you know, mother, it will never do to use tallow ones, especially for the windows down stairs, and in the parlor; the Fields and Pelhams all would laugh, and think that we didn't know any better. We can be careful not to waste them, and we might use the tallow candles in the side windows, and clear way up in the attic, and have the front of the others; that would do. Now, Hannah, give us, please, all your good candles, and we must have them cut up into the right lengths."

"What, Miss Hope, all me best candles; that I've jest rin for the winter's use! Dear heart, childers; an' what'll ye be wantin'

more? Och, me nice, straight candles, that I set such a store by!"

"O, well, Hannah, they are nice candles, I know: yours always are; but when we're all gone this winter, you'll have nothing to do but to run some more. I guess Bridget, who lives at Mr. Pelham's, would give twice as many candles to be able to illuminate for her master."

"Ah, an it's jest so, mum. I'll say no more about it. The Lord forgive me for thinkin o' me poor candles, when the master's so set up," and she delivered the precious box into my hands with an almost cheerful countenance.

An hour of pounding, and sawing, and nailing, and earnest debating, and running hither and thither, and over each other, and things were nearly ready.

Mother called us to come to tea, if we had finished, as they wanted to have the tea-things out of the way, early. I had some slight misgivings — turning at the threshold, as I ran out of the parlor, for another look,

— as to how the best curtains would look next morning when they were unrolled and unpinned from the hard knot into which I had twisted them, out of the way of the candles. But my father's voice at the door suggested that the black satins and some other things might be uppermost in our minds, and it wouldn't matter; besides they would have the winter in which to get over their wrinkles. And I ran and brought father to the door to see it all; and he laughed and asked who fixed the candles, and when I told him, "Kitty and I," he brushed up my curls a little, and wondered if anybody else had "such bright children," and I knew that his wonderment was real, although he said it in that joking way.

He could only stay to swallow a cup of tea, as he said the men wanted him to see about something down at the town hall. I was too excited to comprehend exactly what it was; but he promised to be back very soon.

The rest of us sat down and pretended to

eat a little; but it was no use. And Kit and I danced off with gingernuts in our hands, to take one last look around the rooms, and then up stairs, to put on an extra bow, and subdue a little of the excitement that waved in our disturbed locks. And I wondered, as I brushed out the last shining curl, and tied on my blue ribbons, which were very becoming, what a certain fair-haired youth would say if he could see me now, and whether he would think me *so very plain*. My nose was, without doubt, large, with a suggestion of an upward tendency; and my eyes were rather small, and gray. I certainly was not a beauty, and I turned away; but then, — I held up the candle again, — I was not what might be called ugly; pshaw! as if I cared at all. He was probably engaged, by this time, to some dark-eyed Boston belle, who could give him wealth and position in addition to her love; for Herbert would never marry for wealth or position alone: and I ought to be glad of his good fortune, if I really cared for him, and — I hurried down stairs!

The clock struck seven, and we could wait no longer. In a moment all the candles were lighted, and Kitty, Hannah, Tim and I ran out into the street to see the effect, while mother, in her best cap and black silk, followed after in a more dignified manner, with a handkerchief tied over her head.

"Sure, an' it's orful fine, mum," said Tim, from behind, in a breathless voice. "Hannah, honey, an' it's a proud sight for ye as rin the candles wi' yere own hands!"

"Och, Tim, an' to think o' me grumbling at those dear childers, who wanted 'em so bad: well, well, to think on't! But, I'm afeard, mum," addressing my mother, "that ye'll be afther getting yere rheumatism upon yer, if ye stan' out here in the cowld."

"Yes," said my mother, "and children, you've nothing on your heads. If it were any day but election day I suppose you'd take cold. You have looked quite long enough; now come in. I didn't think the old house could make such a show. But

just see all those people on the sidewalk! Can they be coming to our house? Where is your father?"

We hastened back, and met him at the gate just as the foremost of the group came up.

"Well, neighbor Trist, we thought we'd come over and spend the evening, and visit with you, seeing as you're going away so soon," said the hearty voice of neighbor Johnson. "You'll find a good many of us, come to get us all into your house. But when you come to think that they're all voters and well-wishers, I don't know as there's any too many. We brought the women folks along, too; for if they didn't vote themselves they put other people up to it. Here's my wife, here, wouldn't give a dinner to a poor fellow, to-day, till he'd been down and voted for you. I told her I didn't know about forcing terms on a hungry man; but she said that he didn't know enough to find out for himself, and she thought that Providence put him in her way, to be set right."

"Well, I always did say," said my father, "that Providence puts more helps in our way than we'd any notion of; the only thing we want is wit enough to know when to lay hold of them. But, come in, neighbors, all of you; we're right glad to see you. Come in, come in! there's always room enough in the old house," and he led the way.

"I say, Hope," said old Mrs. Owen, "won't you take some of us out into your kitchen, without letting your mother know, and tell Kitty to show the rest up-stairs, to take off their things. Why," said she, in answer to my look of astonishment, "you didn't suppose that we'd all come in upon you without bringing something along with us, did you? We've been planning this surprise party for a week, in case your pa was elected."

"And were you going to Mr. Pelham's instead, if he had been elected?"

"La, no, child; he isn't our kind, at all. No, in case he had been elected we should have stayed at home, and eaten up our own

things. But now we'll shut the door, and put the things in the kitchen; and if you'll get out some table-cloths we'll go right to work setting the table, and then, after all is ready, we can go in and see the folks awhile before supper."

So I turned over the contents of the drawers, and got the longest and snowiest cloths that I could find; and we brought in a table from the kitchen, and put it beside the dining-table, and pinned the cloths together, and put the mats over the seams, and the effect was very good.

Then we fell to work unpacking the baskets, which came pouring in, with kisses and congratulations from the merry bringers, who, of course, all stayed to help. And such baskets!"

"Why, Hope, child," said Mrs. Owen, laughing, "I shouldn't think you'd ever seen anything to eat before. All you do, as the baskets are opened, is to stand and look in utter amazement. Susie Green, won't you just take this turkey from my hands; she doesn't even offer to!"

"Oh, but I will, Mrs. Owen, only everybody has brought so much of everything that is good. Why, if the whole town were to come, there would be enough!"

"Well, you may have the whole town, for aught you know, before the evening is over; there's no reckoning how many will be here, for everybody knows your pa, and is so glad that he is elected!"

"Except Mr. Pelham," I suggested.

"Well, next to himself, he'd rather have your pa elected than anybody. It won't be many years before the turn comes again, to Slab City, and he'll probably have it then; he's a young man, and can afford to wait."

Here mother's voice was heard at the door: "Hope! where's Hope! Why, is anybody out here! What are you doing?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing at all, Mrs. Trist, only, you mustn't come for the world," shouted a dozen voices.

"What, not a minute? I want to speak to Hope!"

"No, no, not a minute. Hope may go

out and speak to you, if she'll promise not to tell what we're about."

So they opened the door just a crack, and pushed me through the smallest possible space.

"Hope," said my mother, "What is it?"

I put my finger on my lips.

"Well, I can guess, for I heard the dishes rattle. Father says, tell Tim to get down the last barrel of cider from the corn-house, and get all the pitchers you can *find*, and fill them, for some of the men will be up, and want something. It's pretty sweet, and won't hurt them," said she, musingly. "I must go back, now; you'll be in soon, won't you? I've so many to talk to; and Kitty is busy seeing them as they come in."

I squeezed back, and sent Tim for the cider, and we hunted up everything that would hold, to put it in, and, at last, the tables being completed, we proposed to adjourn to the parlor.

"Don't it look splendid?" said Mrs. Owen, surveying it all with a pleased face. And,

indeed, it did! At either end of the board lay an immense cold turkey, flanked by dishes of cranberry-sauce and cider apple-sauce. From the centre, rose a huge pyramid of green and rosy-cheeked apples. Good, deep, motherly chicken-pies, that looked as if they might have sheltered in their capacious beds half the feathered population of the village, and yet had coverlid to spare, stood here and there, each surrounded by smaller circumferences of mince, apple, pumpkin, custard, squash, and others, so numerous, that they could hardly come within the circle of her attraction. Rich, purple, pickled cabbage hung its fringes over the old-fashioned china bowls; snowy mountains of cake rose from the corners, side by side with light, creamy biscuit, while, in the little nooks, where nothing larger could go, saucers of sunny quince jelly shook their shining sides, and cubes of good, wholesome cheese looked up with honest pride. We couldn't find room for the cider, or half the plates of nut-brown

oly koeks and crinkle-edged caraway cookies; so we were fain to tuck them on the mantel-piece, or in the niches of the sideboard. It was, indeed, as Mrs. Owen said, "splendid" to look upon.

"O Hope!" said Kate Fields, as we were going out of the room, "just come back a minute, you haven't seen the greatest thing of all, for I took it out while you were talking with your mother. *That* is my loaf of cake, — the large one that is not cut, near the centre of the table, with the plums on top; and I made it myself, and put a ring in. Of course, it is only for the young ladies, — there aren't any young men, you know, in this region, — and we're going to wait and count how many there are before we cut it, so as to have the pieces just go round; and, of course, you know the one who gets the *ring*, — *there*, don't tell me that you do not *know!* — why, they get married *first*, of course! Well, you needn't blush about it; I do hope it will be you, though, for you'd make the nicest, coziest

little wife. And, now, let us go in and see the fun, for I never heard such peals of laughter from such a staid set of papas and mammas before."

It was, truly, a very merry, social company. My father stood in the midst of a little group of men, relating some funny story of the time when, as boys, they played together, and they alternately shook their sides with laughter, and wiped the perspiration from their brows, while their wives, — a little outside of the charmed circle, — smiled in sympathy with that which was beyond their hearing, or devoted their attention to my mother, who, like most of her sex, similarly situated, — fond and proud, — was telling of what the girls had been planning for the winter, and what they meant to do.

Kitty and I busied ourselves in replacing the candles, which were beginning to burn out, and then, it was so warm, that I thought I would just open the back parlor window a little. How fresh and invigorating

the air felt, as it came into the heated rooms; I put my hot cheek down on the sill for a moment, — and almost cried out, — for a hand reached in and touched me through the opening, and a voice, not quite strange, said, "Don't speak, but come out a moment to the side door!"

I went; and there, under the porch, stood somebody in a cloak, tall and manly, and I felt, rather than saw, that he had fair hair.

"O Herbert! I can hardly believe that you have come, after all," I said, when the first greetings were over; "it is so long since you have been here."

"Yes, Hope, it is a long time; and you don't know how I have wanted to come. But, in my short vacations, I was obliged to be with my father, in Canada, and I kept waiting for the good time, which never came till now. And, at this time, I have only run away for a little while; I *am* on my way to join him; but, hearing that your father was one of the candidates for election, I thought I should like to spend this

evening with you all, — if he were successful, — to offer my congratulations, if not, my sympathies. And here you see me. How glad I am that I could come, — I did not know how glad, until I came up this familiar walk, and saw you at the window. But we must talk fast, for I leave in the midnight stage."

"O Herbert! not here for one day, to go with us to the mill, the grotto, and all our old haunts!"

"No, Hope, don't tempt me; I cannot, though I want to, so much. After this summer, when I graduate, I hope that I shall have a little time to spend, and I promise you that my first plan shall be for this dear place. Then this winter I shall see you in Boston; — how nice that will be! — we will go about, and see ever so many places and things together, which we used to talk of, in those old days, as belonging to fairy-land. How far off Boston was, then, and what a great place to us!"

"It is to me, *now*," said I, laughing.

"You know I am not changed, Herbert, as you must be, somewhat, by going about and seeing people. I am nothing but a little country girl still!"

He laughed. "I forget that we have not seen each other yet. Supposing that you should take me in to the light, for a look, and then present me to your father and mother, and Kitty; I presume I should hardly know Kitty!"

"Indeed, you would not, Herbert. You don't know how handsome she has grown."

He pushed open the door, and we went in. I dared not look up, but pretended to be searching for Kitty, as we passed down the hall. I knew that he was looking at me with his pleasant, but penetrating, gray eyes, and I felt that he smiled, for he said, —

"No, Hope, you have hardly changed, though you have grown tall and womanly; I am so glad. Don't go in for a moment," catching my arm; "let me stand here by the door, and give a look at the people be-

fore they see me. There are your father and mother, just the same as ever; how *good* they *do look!* There's Deacon Smith! Does he come round the corner, Sundays, as he used to, in that old, sunbonnet-topped family carriage, with three generations of Smiths comfortably ensconced inside, and all the little Smiths on the front-seat with him, driving?"

"Yes, indeed," said I, laughing, "just the same, only there are more little Smiths, now. And old Mrs. Smith, do you remember how she used to sneeze in church, like a pussy-cat? It was only last Sunday that I came near laughing out loud at it. But they are real good people. Shall you ever forget that nice dish of apples that always stood on the sitting-room table, and how they used to fill our pockets with them, when we went down on errands for mother? I thought of it to-night, when Mrs. Smith brought up a basket."

"No, indeed, I can taste them yet; and all the seeds which I used to eat up, after

they had spelled your name, Hope!" And he looked again, and I wondered if my face were anywhere near the color of Captain Jones's, who stood a little way from us. "But, Hope," said he, quickly, "do tell me, who is that tall, splendid-looking girl across the room, with dark, bright eyes, and the handsome hair?"

"Why, Herbert, you don't mean to say that you do not really recognize Kitty?"

"Kitty, little, frisky Kitty! Why, how she has changed, Hope; and how stylish and handsome she is. I must go and speak to her," and he made three steps across the room, while I followed after.

She was even *more* surprised than I, to see him. Kitty always said that nobody ever succeeded in astonishing me very much. I do not think that is so, but, to me, true friends can never be *very far away!* I miss their pleasant words, and looks of appreciation, oh, so much! I long to have them near me, that I may watch the earnest thought come creeping over their faces, until, finally,

it shines out in the tell-tale eyes; or, if it be a dearer, tenderer one, plays in and about the characteristic lines of the mouth,—eyes may deceive—lips, never! Yet still, when after a long absence, they come back to me, there is nothing *new* in their presence; I always smile quietly to myself, and say, "it is only the *outward, visible sign* of the spirit; you have *never really* been away; we have not been, as the world has it, separated!" I thought this, as I stood by, watching the group that quickly collected around this new hero of the evening. Father and mother could hardly have welcomed an own son more warmly. All the old men and women wanted a handshake from the handsome fellow, who had been such a favorite with them; and the pretty girls blushed up to their eyes, as he recalled the numerous huskings and chestnutting parties when he had been the beau for them all.

"What a taking fellow he is," said old Mrs. Sizer, in my ear; "and right hand-

some, too," to which I agreed heartily. "Who did he come to see, eh, Hope?"

"Why, he came up to see us all, and to congratulate, or sympathize with father, as the case might be. Wasn't it fortunate that he could come to-night?"

"Yes, for he seems to enjoy it as well, or better than, any of them, and it gives him a chance to see all the people; but, are they going out to supper so soon! What time can it be? I thought we had just come!"

"I guess you've been havin' a nice time, Mrs. Sizer," said old Farmer Joyce, drawing out, with some effort, his great, silver "turnip," and giving it a shake or two. "My watch is apt to run a little slow, but as nigh as I can calkilate, it's nigh on to half-past nine. Supposin' we walk out, now, and get a little bite, for I told our Sim to have the team come for me an' my wife, about this time. He won't mind waitin', though, to see the bonfires and candles; it's quite a pretty show. Miss Hope, I dare say, will find plenty of younger beaux."

"What! Mr. Joyce, here, in this town, that doesn't boast of one young man?"

"Well, well, so it doesn't, to be sure; but there 's one over there" — nodding his head significantly — "that 'll do for a dozen. Come, Mrs. Sizer!" and he trotted off with that good lady upon his arm.

"I believe they are all leaving us for the supper-room," said Herbert, turning round, "and I must endeavor to improve my opportunities as the one youthful beau of the community, — that is, — unless somebody else has appeared in the four years that I've been gone."

"No," said Kitty, "not one single one of the '*genus homo*.'"

"Hope" (turning round), "will you go with me?"

"Not now, Herbert," I said; "you take some of the others. I shall be busy seeing that the rest are helped; and we shouldn't have any real chance for a talk, you know; we will have that after the rest are gone."

He smiled, and offered an arm to Kitty,

and to Kate Fields, while I followed on with the rest.

Then came such a rattling of plates and forks, such chattering and laughing, such good cheer, generally; it was perfectly irresistible.

"Mr. Trist," said Kate, across the table, after the excitement had somewhat subsided, and the ladies had begun to fold up their napkins and gather the crumbs from their dresses, while the cider went round again among the gentlemen. "May I request you to cut that large loaf of cake into twenty-five pieces of equal size? and, then, Mr. Herbert offers to pass it around. It is only for the unmarried ladies, as there is a ring in it."

"Really, Miss Kate," said my father, "I did suppose that if there was one day in the year when ladies lost sight of the '*main chance*,' it was in the hurry and bustle of election day!"

"But, Mr. Trist, would you expect a person to be very much interested in a question

for three hundred and sixty-four days, and not have a thought of it arise on the three hundred and sixty-fifth! Besides, this was all prepared yesterday!"

"Fortified on both sides, I see, Miss Kate, — woman-like; I will submit gracefully. Now, Herbert, if you will do the honors."

So it went, with a good deal of joking, to each of the single ladies in the room, — not excepting Miss Silence Pettibone, — who was, at least, forty-five, and who said that she was determined to try "just once more." I took the last piece, accepting, as my neighbor remarked, my *fate*, without choice; while all looked anxiously for the result of our progress.

"Why, Herbert," cried Kate, her mouth half full of frosting, "I beg your pardon; you ought to have had a piece, above all things! The fact *is*, *gentlemen* were *so entirely* out of my thoughts, that it never occurred to me to count you!"

"Hardly a statement to be expected from

the maker of the cake," said my father, gravely, while Herbert remarked:

"Never mind, Miss Kate. I shall have to perform my part, by taking the one who gets the ring!" There was a general laugh.

"O Herbert! after that declaration, think of the added disappointment of the unfortunate twenty-four!" said I, raising my cake for another bite, when Mrs. Owen, on the opposite side of the table, clapped her hands, calling out:

"Why, Hope, you've got it yourself!"

They all made a rush for my vicinity, and, sure enough, there it was sticking out of the side, very bright and shining. I heartily wished that I could have disappeared in the depths of the chicken-pie, or under the table, or somewhere, but it was no use wishing; so I picked it out very coolly (that is, as far as my face was not concerned), and was about to put it in my pocket, but they all insisted that it must be put upon my finger, and, of course, by gal-

lant Mr. Herbert himself. I believe that he did it; — I don't quite know. There was a moment's hush, when nobody said anything, and I slipped off directly, to offer Mr. Joyce a glass of cider, which happened to be rather an unlucky move, as his peculiarly strict ideas on the subject of temperance were well known to every one in the room. Just then a loud report shook the house, startling all the hysterical old ladies out of their wits; and, directly, voices were heard in the street calling loudly for Squire Trist.

"Now, squire, they've come up for a speech," said Doctor Johnson, patting him on the back; "go out and give it to them, and we'll attend you."

So out we flocked, to the front door-steps, and to the windows, in whatever wrappings we could lay hold of, and my father mounted the horse-block under the old elm, just outside the gate, cleared his voice once or twice, and said:

"Fellow-citizens, I accept the office of representative from this district, and will

serve you according to the best of my abilities. In my opinion, the representatives have made too many laws. I am in favor of having them remain as they are, unless a change should be for the benefit of the people, in which case I am for a change; but, understand me, I am only for so much of a change as is for the public good." (Great cheering. "That's the story." "Hurrah for Squire Trist.") He broke in, and said, "I thank you for the generous support you have given me, and for the approval you have given of my political principles, which I entertain in common with Gladstone, and other distinguished statesmen. I hope I shall see you while at my labors in the state-house.

"And now, my friends, come in, come in. Our neighbors have brought with them so much good cheer, that we shall need your assistance in disposing of it; and I can give you, for my part, a glass of nice, rich cider, from my own mill."

Then cheer followed cheer; for the squire,

for the squire's neighbors, and for the ladies. We flew back into the house, to rearrange the tables a little, while they all poured in. Fortunately, the sources of the good things proved unfailing, and many a poor, forlorn fellow enjoyed a good, hearty meal, and left with a nutcake or two in his pocket, which my thoughtful mother sent to "the baby." Then, after drinking my father's health in the good cider, they filed out, with pleased faces, and hearty "God bless you, sirs," and giving one more cheer for "our honored representative," followed by a discharge from the old cannon, that brought a few of our windows rattling down, they marched off in triumph.

Then came the finding of everybody's baskets, and plates, and napkins; and, after that, the shawls, and hoods, and rubbers, which seemed to have strayed off into every possible out-of-the-way place; then the cordial good-byes, and my hands were fairly lame, especially where the ring came.

"I declare," said Farmer Joyce, coming

under the hall lamp, and pulling the old watch out again, "if it ain't most eleven. I shouldn't blame our team, wife, a bit, if it had gone off and left us."

Well, at last they had all gone, and the candles, burned nearly down, cast a fitful glare over the little group remaining; but we put a fresh log on the fire, and it blazed up cheerily, as we gathered round.

"Come, husband," said my mother to him, as he stood musingly in the window, "we will say good-by to Herbert, and leave the girls to see him off, for it has been a fatiguing day to us. What are you pondering over, — the broken glass?"

"I was only wondering, wife," said he, with a smile, stepping carefully over the shining fragments on the floor, "whether, between the attentions of our friends, and the expectations of our gay daughters, we could afford more than one year of office; what think you? Good-night, and good-by, Herbert; we're always glad to see you here, my boy, and I hope you'll come to

see us when we get to Boston. Good-night, my children."

It seemed but a moment, as we sat there so cozily over the fire, Herbert, Kitty, and I, talking over the old times, and making plans for the winter, before the distant rumble of the old stage was heard. We went out to the steps with him, to say good-by. It brought back that cool morning, four years ago.

"The roses were all in bloom, Herbert, when you last left us."

"Yes, Hope, I remember;" and he kissed, in the darkness, the hand with the ring on, said good-by, and was gone. We hastened in out of the cold, and sat down a moment before the fire.

"Hope," said Kitty, "he is real handsome, isn't he?"

"Yes, Kitty: and what a fine beau he'll be for us this winter. Oh, I'm *so* happy to think that father is elected, I don't know what to do; and how charming everything was to-night; and how nice that Herbert

was here, — I know he enjoyed it. And how funny that it should be you that had the ring; he always liked you. I only wish you could have seen your own face."

"Why, Kitty, did I look anything?"

"Oh, no, nothing at all; only one of your delicate rose-color flushes, you know, dear."

"Well, Kit, I'm sure I don't see who could have helped it."

"Nor I either, dear sis; don't be furious; I only wanted to tease you a little. But do come up to bed; I'm so tired." And, seizing the last flickering candle, she ran off, while I lingered, setting back a few chairs, by the light of the moon, which streamed in through the uncurtained windows, and dreading to have this day come to a close, in which I had been so happy; and, as I sat down on the low window-seat, watching the feeble light of the bonfires on the green, I felt so sorry to think that for every joyful family there must be a disappointed one; and I was glad that Mr. Pelham was a

bachelor, and had no one in particular to mourn over his loss; for it is so much harder to be disappointed for one whom you love dearly than for one's self. And, remembering the loving kindness that had answered my prayer, crowning the anxious day with so much happiness, my heart was filled with thankfulness to Him who had given us this pleasant thing. Then, as the old clock in the corner struck one, turning away regretfully, I pulled out the andirons, and, having covered the glowing brands with the soft, white ashes, followed on slowly up-stairs, where, laying my weary head on the pillow, I soon fell asleep, and dreamed that I took off my precious ring, and gave it to Kitty.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

IT was not quite six by the tall clock in the dining-room, as we sat toasting our feet around the fire, — the morning after Christmas, — three of the happiest souls alive.

"At last," as Kitty said, "the feminine element was renovated, and in a situation to represent, with honor, the interests of the people of Slab City." Hannah was flying around, warming bricks for our feet, and urging the necessity of starting upon full stomachs, while she presented the hottest of coffee, and the most tempting of buckwheats, with an equal want of success, interrupted by mother, who was reiterating

last, warning words, — "to be careful of fire, and to keep the doors locked."

Tim had been dragging out the precious results of our labors for the past month, to the end of the piazza, carefully stowed away in mother's big leather trunk. Kitty's new hat-box, and the little, round calfskin trunk, which grandma had had made for me a birthday present, with my initials, "H. T." in brass nails, on one end. One bandbox reposed quietly on top of all, for we could not possibly get all our things in; but I had put a brown-linen cover upon it, so that, as mother said, "No one would think particularly about its being a bandbox."

The room looked so cheerful and cozy, as the rays of light streamed out from the fireplace, and were answered by the flickering candles from the table, that I half wondered if anything in all Boston could be pleasanter, and suggested to Mrs. Pussy, who sat winking by the fender, that, perhaps after all, she might have the best time of it

at home, so safely sheltered from the temptations of society, — at which remark Kitty laughed scornfully, and asked if I had not better make up my mind to remain with her! There was no time to reply, for a jingle of bells, and the creaking of runners on the snow, broke the silence outside, as the stage turned up to the gate, and we hastened to gather together our wraps and travelling baskets.

I could not help thinking, as we went out into the frosty starlight, of the last time that we came to meet the old stage. Then, the ground was bare, and the full moon bathed us in its soft, rich light, while now, the snow lay folded close over all, and a pale crescent floated among her stars like some redeemed and purified spirit, far removed from earthly cares and passions. I could have wished that the little new moon, with its sympathetic young face, full of bright hopes, — like a girl's, — had looked down upon us as we started, everything seemed so cold and uncertain, and far away.

But while I was thinking these things we were being tucked into the stage, and carefully wrapped up by the driver, Tim, and Hannah; while the sleepy passengers opened each an eye, and looked curiously upon our proceedings, and one old lady whispered to her neighbor on the back seat, "Three trunks and a bandbox; I guess they're goin' to make a stay of it."

Well, we were off at last. I did not feel like talking, and leaned back in my seat, watching, through a chink in the great leather curtain, the quiet stars looking down upon the expanse of snow-covered fields and woods, with the cold, dark outline of the mountains beyond all, and wondering, in a helpless kind of way, what this great outside world, in which we were so soon to take a part, was like. I wished that I were as much as forty years old, and settled down, and knew the portion that I was to have in it, — past all the timid, fluttering hopes, and fears, and dreams, that haunt a girl's life, and make it such a painful, deli-

cious weariness. Are people past all this at forty? Do they outgrow it? Shall I ever be so old?

Mother and Kitty fell asleep with the rest, and the whole assemblage nodded and blinked at each other in a most confidential way, keeping time to a low bass chorus. Only the crack of the driver's whip, and the cheerful jingle of the bells broke the morning stillness. The stars faded out, one by one, and the east began to glow faintly with the flush of coming day. Here and there, a thin wreath of smoke curled up into the frosty air from the chimney of a wayside cottage, and a light gleamed from the little window out across the snow, telling of another busy day begun.

About seven o'clock, we drew up at the hotel in a small village, to change horses, and here the passengers wakened and shook themselves. Some of the men got out, and went in, while the women pulled out great papers of luncheon, and fell to work upon their breakfast. By the time

we started again it was quite light, and every one sat up and looked about him, preparatory to "dropping into remarks."

The first man thought "they had not as much snow down this way as where he came from," and the second wanted to know "where that *from* might be." Then they talked over the prospects of a hard winter, and a late spring for crops, and farming operations in general; and mother got on her spectacles, and made a mild remark about something Mr. Trist had said of the weather in Boston; whereupon some one asked if "that was Trist, the representative from Slab City; they used to know a second cousin of his."

In short, before we reached the junction at noon, we knew where every person had come from, and where he or she was going, and they all knew that we were Squire Trist's wife and daughters, and were going down to visit him in Boston, where we were to board; and what we expected to do; as well as all about election day, and our party

in the evening. The fat man, my neighbor, had promised to call on us in the spring, when he brought down a load of cheese, and had invited Kitty and me to visit his daughters in "sugaring time." The old lady in the opposite corner was going to visit her daughter-in-law, in Boston, and said, with a nod of her head, she would come and see us, and bring her son, "a right smart fellow, in the drug business, and a great hand for pretty girls." So, at the end of our journey, we parted with a cordial hand-shake, and went our several ways.

Mother, Kitty, and I, after many misgivings as to our baggage, were fairly embarked on the train, and the world did not seem so doubtful a thing, after all, with such kindly people round us, and the genial sun shining down upon all.

It was at sunset time that we came in sight of the city. How beautiful it looked, rising from the water as we approached it, more like the "city of pearl, and the sea

of glass," in Revelation, than anything that I had ever seen. I had no idea that there could be any beauty in a city itself. I suppose that I must have looked astonished, for the gentleman who shared my seat — a pleasant, intelligent man, who had told me a good deal about the places we passed — smiled, and asked me what I thought of it. He seemed amused when I told him, and said that distance, in this case, as in many others, lent enchantment, as Boston was considered rather objectionable, on account of its narrow, crooked streets, but that I should find in it many objects worthy of admiration.

As we were coming into the dépôt, he gave me his card, saying that he should probably meet my father at the state-house, and with my permission would call upon us, to inquire how I liked the city upon further acquaintance, and perhaps he could help us to see some of the pleasant things. I don't know exactly what reply I made, for at that moment who should appear but our

papa, looking just as natural as ever, and by the time that our first delight was over, the man had disappeared, and I had dropped the card. I was so sorry. Papa, however, went back and found it, and we looked at the name, — Mr. John Harding, — a very good name, we all agreed. But we had not much time to think of it, as papa hastened us out, and called to one of the numerous hackmen, who were waiting, like so many beasts of prey, to fall upon us.

How grand it seemed to be going to the house in such a nice carriage, with a span of horses. I whispered to papa that I had just as lief walk with him, if it cost too much; but he pinched my cheek, and said, "No; we would all go up together in style for once; the daughter of a representative must not condescend to make her first appearance on foot." I think that he said it in joke, for papa is too settled down in his independent ways to have become proud from a month's living in the city, though I dare say those who are less sensible than

he may have had their heads turned by the attention they receive as strangers. I always used to think, when I was translating my Cæsar in the Latin class, what an honorable thing it must be to be appointed as ambassador at a foreign court, and to appear in the presence of royalty.

It seemed very miraculous that our trunks should come to their destination without any trouble. Father asked the man if he charged extra for three, and he said, "No, not for such as these;" giving what I considered quite a contemptuous toss to my beautiful little hair trunk. Our poor bandbox, alas! was a sight to behold. It was nearly flat, with Kitty's and my best bonnets in it, and we had been so particular about the shape, and the little raised coronet on top! So much for my pride. I might have carried it, but Kitty said she wouldn't be seen with it, and mother said, "Do as you please." I was thankful that I had put on the linen cover; for if I had not, the things would all have dropped out. I quite

agreed with the driver, who remarked, as he held it up by the strings, "Them things weren't never meant to travel in cars."

It was quite dark when we drove up to our boarding-house, which looked very palatial in the uncertain glimmer of the street lamps. Father said, as he led the way up the steps, "This, my dears, was formerly quite a fashionable part of the city, — the houses have really an aristocratic look; but now it is entirely given up to boarding-houses and stores." It was quite a comfort to hear this. Kitty and I had been a little afraid, privately, that we should have to go to some very cheap place, where the people would be common and second-class, and it seemed rather hard, when we were the first people at home. Besides, second-class people from the city always seem more vulgar than country people of the same standing. I don't think it is their fault. I suppose that a kind Providence makes up to them in some other gifts, for the loss of a certain refinement which must creep in-

sensibly into the heart and nature of any one who walks upon green grass and flowers, and breathes the spicy breath of the woods, and hears the singing of the stream, even though he do it quite unconsciously. Of course, we do not mean to be aristocratic in the country; nobody seems to have any right, unless it be the beautiful trees, and the grand old mountains, and perhaps the tiger-lilies in the front yards.

Such a happy evening as we passed, all together once more! We had tea served in our room, as it was so late that we could not prepare for our first appearance. Papa would have liked to take us out somewhere, to celebrate our arrival, but mamma said, "No, we must get settled, as to-morrow was Sunday." So we unpacked and put away, and then drew up around the grate, and talked until late of all that had happened since we met.

CHAPTER II.

KITTY and I were up early the next morning, for she said first impressions were everything, and we must make a very particular toilette for breakfast, as every one would be sure to examine us from top to toe. So I resigned myself, and prinked very patiently before the glass for at least half an hour, and Kitty, after a little pull here and there at my hair and bows, pronounced me "vastly respectable," adding, by way of advice for the future, "Now, Hope, if you would always take as much pains, you could look very well; you must study your style!" I couldn't help sighing, in spite of the compliment, for I suppose that a waterfall is my style, and it is such a labor to get up one or two every day. Kitty says that she should do it if she were all alone by herself in the desert of Sahara. She always does look

beautiful and stylish. When the last finishing touches were given, we had yet a little time before father and mother were ready, which we improved in examining our quarters. The room was small, with one window, which looked out into the side of somebody's house, about three feet distant. How I missed the far-off stretch of meadows, and the outline of the hills against the sky, softened by the fringe of trees growing upon the summit, which always greeted my waking eyes at home, — always the same, yet always different, like the face of a familiar friend. But father's cheery voice made itself heard, inquiring if we were not coming in to take a front view of things. Here it was much better. The sun shone in brightly, and gave even the stiff block of stores opposite a certain genial expression; but it is wonderful how rooms and their fittings will be so characteristic of the life of their occupants. It all had such a boarding-house look!

The sofa bore unmistakable signs of the

weariness of its successive occupants, the Solferino curtains hung down with a dejected air, as if they were tired of trying to please everybody, and the walls, somehow or other, reminded me of old Colonel Robbins, who spends a week or two every summer at Slab City; — they had the same disgusted sort of expression. Poor man! he looks very disagreeable; yet, I often wonder about his life, — he seems so little like the rest of people. I noticed that some scholarly people in speaking of him used a French adjective, which sounded like our *blasted*. I do not remember exactly what they said; but, always in thinking of him, I have the idea of a flower which has been carried about in the cars, and has reached its destination all soiled and withered. It will not revive fully with all your care; it does not seem to have the courage to start up again with the stain of the world upon it. Not that he is at all like a flower, — and yet when he was little, he may have been a pretty baby, — and I suppose it was only

the combination of his natural tendencies with circumstances which, together, brought him down.

I wonder if people are better in the end, whose daily life does not flow in accordance with their desires. I wonder if it would be better for Kitty, who would shine so in society, to live in some out of the way country place, and wear old clothes.

We gather flowers in the woods and fields, and bring them to our homes to fade and be thrown away, while their companions that are left go on ripening seed and filling out their life to the very end, if there ever is an end to those who sow for the future. It seems a pity, though, that they should never be seen. There must be a heaven even for flowers, I think. I wish I had a wise friend whom I could talk to about all these things. I wonder if I might find one in all this city; there surely ought to be *one* among so many. Herbert, I don't think could tell me.

Mother's cap was fixed at last, and we

went down to breakfast. As Kitty had said, everybody looked interested, and stared as politely as possible, and, after we were seated, papa introduced us all around. He seemed to be a general favorite; and they were all very kind in asking how we bore the journey, and in making the dozen or more remarks which constitute the stock-in-trade of kindly disposed strangers.

Then there came a pause, and I looked anxiously at the company. There was a nice old gentleman at the head of the table, whom I decided to adopt as a friend for the family. Next him a young couple, who had evidently only lately started upon the journey of life together, — she, gentle, uninteresting, anxious to please, — he, tall and dark, with a fierce expression of moustache and whisker, which was singularly contradicted by the retreating chin. Then came several widows in various stages of preservation and hopefulness, with purple ribbons in their caps, and hair in their breastpins; and a pale-faced clerk or two.

What a fortunate thing it is, that almost everybody has some good points which come out upon farther acquaintance. I could not help feeling a kind of hopelessness at the thought of meeting these people at every meal, though I knew that I should perhaps feel even a little regretful at parting from them in the end.

Breakfast was so late that we had to excuse ourselves, and hasten, in order to be ready for church. Papa took us to one that was beautifully dressed for Christmas-day, with greens and flowers. I never before saw anything so wonderful as it was, and how they ever did it, I am sure I cannot tell. All the boys and girls at home worked for a week getting the greens, and winding wreaths, before our fair, and it all together was not as much as one corner of this; and, as for flowers, we had none, excepting some made of pop-corn, — on wires, — set in bunches of laurel-leaves, which every one said looked very natural.

It seemed very strange to see so many

fixings on Sunday. I could not keep my mind on the service at all; I kept counting the camelias in the wreaths, and the number of tuberoses between them; and then I thought that I would remember how the pulpit was done, so that I might tell the girls at home about it for our post-office, which we generally have in the old desk in the Town Hall, at our strawberry-festival. We do not decorate our churches. I am afraid old Parson Knapp would faint with surprise if we should. And, just as I was in the midst of it all, the minister said, "Let us pray," and I felt shocked to think I had been so wicked. I tried to lean back in the pew, and cover up my eyes, but Kitty pulled my dress, and made a motion that I was hitting the end of my feather against the high pew-back and rumpling my curls, so I sat up very straight, and read from my book. I could not keep the place at all, for they skipped about, and went so fast; and, looking over to find the index, my eye fell upon the title-page,—"The prayers of the First

Unitarian Church." So there we were in a Unitarian Church, among those wicked people, whom Deacon Eldredge was praying the Lord to rend asunder and confound utterly, — poor, misguided souls! I should never have thought it of them; they looked as good and peaceable as any one in Slab City. They gave very good attention, with the exception of some of the young men, who yawned and stroked their moustaches; but, then, our young men do that. And the older ladies appeared much more absorbed than they do with us, — they put down their heads so meekly, and did not nibble caraway-seeds, or stir up the coals in their foot-stoves.

Then that beautiful prayer in their book, "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways." It does not seem as if God would let them wander very far, if they kept saying that over from their hearts. I wonder if Deacon Eldredge ever saw any Unitarians. How surprised he would be if he should find, when he got to heaven, that, for some

reason, which we are not now to know, they had been let in too!

As we got up to sing I could not help giving a glance around. I did not know but by some chance Herbert might have come to see the decorations; he always admired such things. I always seem to think of him in church. Perhaps it is because I have the same sort of safe, rested feeling that I have with him, as if all thought or care were taken away for the time being.

After church, papa took me up to see Kate Fields, who is boarding here with an aunt. The servant, who was a colored man, and very polite, took us into a beautiful parlor, and said he would inquire if she would see us. Father laughed, and said he guessed there wasn't much doubt about that, but the man acted as if he thought our chances very slight.

Presently, down he came, and took us up two long flights, at the head of which Kate was waiting for us.

"Do you have a parlor all by yourselves,"

I asked, as she ushered us into a room with lace curtains, and flowers, and ornaments of all kinds.

"Oh, yes, of course, everybody does in Boston; it isn't considered the thing to take your friends in where every one can interrupt you, and hear what you say. Besides, boarding-house parlors are always so cheerless, and you can't take people into your bedroom."

"But we shouldn't mind the callers we have, Kate; there's nobody but Herbert, and he's used to going all over the house at home."

"Why, my dear, don't you expect to make any acquaintances? You know that you and Kitty must pick up some beaux while you are here, and Herbert may want to bring some of his friends to call with him. We have a little bit of a bedroom back, and I dress in the parlor, and we brought some of our books and things to make it pleasant, and every evening somebody or other comes in to see us, — there

are so many nice people in the house, — quite the élite. How I wish that you could board here; it is only twenty dollars a-piece per week, with a few extras."

"Twenty dollars! Why, Kate, we pay eight, and feel almost ruined! We couldn't pay more, possibly. Our people, I think, can't be the élite, but then they're quiet and respectable. I feel as if we ought to be very thankful for that, and I expect to enjoy it very much, especially the going about. Now, when will you come and see us; for papa is looking at his watch, and I know that it must be near dinner-time?"

What to do for a parlor puzzled me all the way home, and grew to be a profound anxiety, as we looked, for the first time, into the drawing-room of our landlady, on coming out from dinner. Such a forlorn place as it was, with its large-patterned, faded carpet, stiff, haircloth furniture, and big gilt vases on the mantel, before the mirror. Not a book on the table, not a cheerful thing in the room, except the por-

traits of two children in long pantalettes and pigtails, holding a wreath of flowers between them, which put Kitty into a spasm of laughter. How could any one make themselves agreeable in such a room?

Once up-stairs, I confided my woes to the family.

"I don't know what I can do for you, my dear," said my father, pushing his specs on to the top of his head. "There isn't another room in the house, and if there were, we could hardly afford it; but I'll do anything you propose," and he settled his specs again, and buried his face in his paper.

"I know it's the thing," said my mother. "I remember those Peases that came up to Slab City from New York, how particular they were about a parlor in the hotel, where nobody would have troubled them; but I don't see what we can do?"

"I know of one thing, mother, if you'd like it! You and father take our room, and move out the bed from this one, and Kitty and I can make up a bed on the

floor every night, and keep the mattress up against the wall in your room in the daytime; then the washstand we could put behind the door, with the big haircloth rocking-chair in front of it. What do you say to it, mother, — wouldn't that be fine?"

Mother smiled. "I don't know about you, girls, sleeping on the floor. You will have the hardest part of the arrangement; but if father agrees, I will speak to the landlady about it."

So it was all arranged, and the next morning we had a vigorous overturning of beds and furniture. Father laughed quietly to himself as he sat in one corner reading his papers, with one eye upon our proceedings. As he went out, he slipped a five-dollar bill into my hand, whispering, "If you can get anything with that to make the little room look pretty, do it." How rich I felt, and how much five dollars judiciously expended would do. I walked up to the old Solferino curtains, and gave a tug at

them, — "Hateful things, these shall come down first!"

"But, my dear," interposed mother, alarmed, "five dollars won't buy damask curtains!"

"No; but, mother, couldn't we get the commonest white muslin, and make some; they would be clean, at any rate, and look better than these!"

"Well," said my mother, meditatively, "we might do that, and they would do afterwards for the best chamber at home; we've needed some this long while. If you and Kitty feel like going after them this morning, we could make them right away before any one came; you can just slip on your hoods, it's a snowy morning, and there won't be many out."

So Kitty and I put on our new hoods, which grandma Reynolds had sent us; they were black, with a pink border for Kitty, and a blue one for me, — nice warm ones, — with long ends to tie over, and mittens to match. "Just the things," grandma said,

"to wear in Boston, where the east winds were so piercing."

It was very quiet in the little street where we lived, but as soon as we turned out of it we encountered a crowd of people hurrying along as if they minded the snow as little as it minded them. We found a shop at last, and some curtain-muslin, which we thought quite pretty and cheap. I was thinking, as we waited for our change, what we should buy with the rest, when Kitty turned round quite fiercely, and said, —

"Hope, we haven't seen a person yet with a hood on; I've looked at every one; they wear their best bonnets every day. We must go right home; I wouldn't meet anyone for the world!"

It did seem as if Kitty was right. Even the children, and the poor people, if there were any, didn't wear anything but bonnets and hats, — it was a pity, I thought, this cold weather. How different the world is in different places!

I could hardly tease Kitty to go on a little

farther, and spend the rest of our money, she seemed so thoroughly depressed. The first thing that caught my eye was an ivy. We thought that would be so pretty to train on our curtains. Then we bought a little vase and bracket of a poor man, who was selling them out on the sidewalk, in the cold.

I was holding the ivy and bundles in the back part of a store, while Kitty was looking at ribbons, when we heard a familiar voice say, —

"Why, Hope and Kitty, are you here?" and, turning round, I nearly dropped everything, for there stood Herbert, looking so tall and handsome. I couldn't shake hands, for mine were so full, but he didn't seem to mind, for he shook them, bundles and all, until I begged his kind consideration for my ivy, whereupon he laughed and took it himself, in spite of my entreaties. "I might have known that Hope would have a bit of a green thing about her, even if it were in Boston, in the midst of a snow-storm. What

are you doing, Hope? trying to make a backwoods out of your room?"

"Only trying to make it a little homey, Herbert, so that you may like to come and see us in it. Did you know that we were here, and were you coming?"

"I was going up to the State House, Hope, to ask your father, this very day; and now I am going to walk home with you, and carry your things. Only wait here a minute, while I speak to my friend who is out waiting for me by the door." He put down the ivy, went to the door, saw his friend depart, and came back to us, taking our bundles and leading the way out, after a moment.

We did not go home the way we came; he took us round through a quieter street, where he said it would be easier walking. I was sorry, for I liked to see all the people, but Kitty seemed pleased, though she had a vexed little flush on her cheek which puzzled me, and she left the talking to me, which was so unusual, that I thought Her-

bert noticed it. He went in with us to see mother, and have a little talk, and we showed him all that we were going to do.

"It will look famously when it's all done," said he, "and I'll bring in Gray, to call, if I may. Gray's my chum, and he's heard me speak of you, and seen your father." Then, as it was dinner-time, he said he must go, and promised to come the next evening.

"I wish he'd stay at home, and keep Gray with him," said Kitty, with a stamp of her foot, as the door closed.

"Why, Kitty, what has happened now? I thought something was the matter."

"Simply that Herbert has grown a little fine, and was ashamed of his country friends when he met them in the store. That was Gray with him; I knew him from his photograph; he might have introduced him then, if he'd wanted to!"

"But, Kitty, you were ashamed of having on your hood!"

"Of course I was! I've a perfect right to

be ashamed of myself, but he hasn't to be of me! However, I'll make it up to his majesty, — I'll flirt with Gray. You needn't blush, Hope, for him; he didn't for himself."

"Why, Kit, you are real mean; I don't believe he thought of the thing,—it isn't like him; but if he did, I think it was in kindness. He probably knew that first impressions, as you say, are everything, and Gray is a city fellow, and wouldn't allow for it, as he could."

"Now, Hope, don't exasperate me by finding excuses for all that fellow's misdeeds. When you have a friend, you seem to think that everything he does is according to law and gospel, which doesn't say much for your experience in human nature. You allow them to lead you by the nose, and it's my private opinion, that if you hadn't had me to look after you, you'd have been at sea in the bowl with the 'wise men of Gotham' long before this. Do put another pin in your waterfall, and twist your bow

round to the right. I shall keep you up to the mark, now, if only for the sake of that provoking Herbert."

"You won't say a word about it to father or mother, Kitty," I whispered, as we went down-stairs to dinner.

"No, no, you goose; I won't disparage him in the eyes of the world, for your sake."

We were finishing off the curtains by the last rays of daylight, when there came a knock at the door, and the maid handed in some things which she said had been left for us. We hastily removed the wrappings, and there was the most beautiful basket, filled with plants, and vines trailing down over the sides, with "Hope," in Herbert's handwriting, pinned on the handle.

"O Kitty! how beautiful to hang in our window, and how kind of him. Don't you feel condemned for your hard thoughts?"

"Humph! it's easy enough to send presents," muttered Kitty, — only half appeased, — "but I declare, Hope, this is pretty," (as

she dived into the other bundle.) "I don't know but I'll forgive him; I've always wanted a 'statoo' so much, and just look at this one of 'Una and the Lion,' — how lovely!"

Even mother was not forgotten, for another knock came, and the loveliest little work-table was handed in, — of brown wicker-work, — with fancy little baskets, lined with crimson silk, on the top, and a good, deep, motherly one below, to hold substantial things. I don't know which was the happiest of us three. The tears came into mother's eyes.

"The boy remembers every one," she said. "It's too handsome to use, though; you girls might keep some of your best work in it."

"Oh, no, mother, that would not please Herbert; you must have it by your side, filled with sewing, when he comes in. Nothing is too good, now. Are we not all Representatives?"

It did look very bright and cheerful as

father came in. He stood in the doorway, and held up both hands.

"Don't stand there, pa, but come inside, and tell us if it is not pretty," cried Kitty, dragging him in, and shutting the door.

The soft muslin curtains fell to the floor, and were looped back with ribbons. In one window stood the work-table, and in the other hung the basket, while Kitty's statuette stood on the bracket, and the little vase between the old gilt candelabra, — remnants, I suppose, of our landlady's father's departed grandeur. At least, as Kitty said, they had not the crime of being cheap and new, and that was something!

"If we only had a picture or two," I said, "one to put over the mantel-piece, and one over the sofa, to hide that yellow spot on the paper, it would be quite perfect. Now, I wonder who our first callers will be. I wish we could run out and find a four-leaved clover, Kit, to put over the door. There's no telling who'll come; it might be our fate, you know."

"To be sure, it will probably be Herbert, and everybody thinks he is Hope's fate, now."

"Why, Kitty, how can you say such things; I shan't enjoy him a bit. You know it isn't so; I never —"

"Why, Hope, how can you flush such a becoming red, and get into a rage with your little sister, all on account of a fellow you take so little interest in? If it will please you any better, I'll agree that he is smitten with me, and you don't stand any chance. Come, laugh a little, you know you want to."

"Kitty Trist, I'll not condescend to argue with you; you're enough to provoke a saint!"

"Am I, my dear, I'm glad to have your word for it, for I've set my heart on provoking Herbert. I haven't quite forgiven him, and I mean to be utterly oblivious of his presence, and devote myself to Gray. There's nothing like letting men think you can live without them," and Kitty

sailed across the room, and arched her pretty brows before the glass.

We were not left long in doubt as to our callers. Kitty was still absorbed in the contemplation of her charms, and I was standing on the window-seat, giving a little water to my precious basket, when father opened the door from the hall, saying, "Yes, walk right in, and you will find my wife and daughters."

We turned hastily, and there stood the most condescending old lady I had ever seen, looking about her with keen, bright eyes, and, just behind her, the man who sat beside me in the cars. His face looked quite like an old friend's, — now, that I saw it again, — and was such a relief, after his mother's, — for it was evident that she bore that relation to him, —that I went forward with rather more warmth of manner than I intended, to greet him. He presented me to her, saying that she was an old school-mate of my mother's, and that he had brought her to renew the acquaintance.

Kitty motioned to me to place the rocking-chair for her, facing the windows, and back to the yellow spot, and stepped to the next room to call mother, while Mrs. Harding said to me, in rather a lofty way, that her son had spoken to her of his pleasant meeting with me in the cars. She had a peculiar way of saying, "My son;" it seemed to say, "he is my son, and I trust will never esteem any one more highly than his mother."

For the first time I looked at him curiously; he was at least forty, — pleasant, and refined, and quiet-looking. But I could not help thinking how he would look beside Herbert, who was so fresh and fair, and straight and tall. I suppose it was this that gave me courage to say, carelessly, that Mr. Harding was very kind and polite, as we were ladies travelling alone, and unaccustomed to the care of baggage.

She seemed relieved, and said, with something of real kindness, "I discovered that your mother was an early friend of mine. I remember her with a great deal of pleasurk,

and hope that I can do something to make her stay pleasant for her, as she is a stranger here."

Poor little mother! how nice it would be! I had been so afraid that, while father had his business friends, and Kitty and I our young people, she would have no one in particular. I quite forgave, as I thanked her, her motherly jealousy. If I had an only son I dare say I should feel just so; and she looked as if she were quite inclined to excuse me for being myself. By this time mother had come in in her best cap, and was talking over her early experiences, so I sat still, and took a realizing view, — a "sense of things," — as mother calls it. She certainly would have looked very lovely to any one, with her kindly, sensible face, and cordial manner. I thought Mrs. Harding was pleased.

Mr. Harding evidently appreciated father, and thought Kitty handsome. I could see it in his face. A thoughtful face he had, — full of kindness, — with clear eyes, and

a manly voice; bald, though, on the top of his head, and just a trifle worn, as if he had never been quite free. His mother held the string lightly, it is true, but firmly, and, though it was long, yet there was an end. If she had not been his mother all his life, she could not have held it. I wonder what people would be like if they grew up only one in a family. I suppose we all hold, or are held.

My meditations were interrupted by a knock at the door behind me, — a man with two pictures for Mr. Trist.

"Papa, these for you?"

"For me, certainly," said my father; "bring them in here, John, or whatever your name may be. You remember, my dear, you were wishing this afternoon for a picture to cover that spot on the wall" (alas, Kitty, for your care, as he nodded at it — the big chair turned round — and looked), "and one for the mantel-piece; and I thought in a minute of these two, which I had seen in the window of an auc-

tion-room, down in one of the side streets, so I put on my hat and ran down, and asked him what he'd let me have them for, and he said he didn't know, but, as I wanted them so bad, he'd say five dollars apiece, and they're just as good as new, only a little scratched on the frame, where nobody'd notice. He said they came from one of the grand old houses on Beacon Street, and they'd never have parted with them, if they hadn't been going to Europe to stay, and so they let him have them. Just wait a minute till you see them! ' and my father, who had been gesticulating earnestly above the pictures, turned them over and began to untie them.

Kitty, whose face was like a cabbage-rose, here interposed, gently. "Never mind, now, papa; our friends won't be interested; they can see them when they come again."

"No, no, it won't take a minute; I must have you see them; here it comes! Now, Hope, look, — 'The Landing of the Pil-

grims,' and 'Christopher Columbus in sight of Land,' — two good historical pictures, that'll do to hand down to our grandchildren, with nice, wide, substantial frames,— rosewood, too, or imitation of it, — and only ten dollars! I didn't quite feel as if I could afford it, but they were so cheap, and I thought wife and the girls would be so pleased."

Now, if anybody ever did live, to whom all respect and affection are due, it is surely Christopher Columbus and the Pilgrim Fathers, and I had wept many and many a time over their respective sorrows, and thought of them with still increasing reverence, — but, somehow, that gallant young man, with a cloak swung gracefully over one shoulder, staring with wild eyes over the water, never recalled to me the great-hearted adventurer; and when I surveyed the group upon the frozen shore, it seemed to me such a feeble representation of what that most thrilling moment must have been! And here they were, our own, to be a part

of our daily life; as such things must be to quiet people, who have so few. I looked up involuntarily in despair, and caught Mr. Harding's eye, then hastened away to my father, who waited for my sympathy. After all, what was worth a thought, save the love that had sacrificed self to give us this pleasure? And I kissed him, and said, "Thank you, papa, for remembering our extravagant wishes; I am sure they will remind us of all that is noble and beautiful." And I took the stiff old Pilgrims, and the dashing Christopher Columbus, into my heart forever.

Mr. and Mrs. Harding did not remain long after, but they made us promise to dine with them in a few days.

Mr. Harding slipped over to me a moment, and said, "I see that you appreciate pictures; I shall enjoy so much showing you those that I have been collecting for some years past. There are so few who really care about them."

"It will be the greatest privilege to me,"

I said, "for I have seen so few. How I shall anticipate it!"

He looked pleased, and was going to say something more, but Mrs. Harding turned round and said she was waiting.

We had a pleasant call afterwards from Herbert and Gray. Kitty looked and acted her prettiest, and I could see that they were both charmed with her. Father and mother had retired. Father said, "the young folks must excuse them; they would have just as good a time alone, he presumed," at which Gray smiled a little, and Herbert blushed. I don't suppose that is quite the way they do things in the city, from what I've heard. Kate said it wasn't considered the thing to leave young ladies and gentlemen alone together, but I am sure I don't see why, for if they were gentlemen it would make no difference, and if they were not, I am quite sure that the meekest woman would have enough spirit to protect herself from any rudeness. I wonder that any man is brave enough to face an indignant woman.

Kitty and I congratulated ourselves that night, as we brushed our hair out over the fire, upon our first evening of reception.

"It was all so nice, Hope," said she. "The room looked fresh and pretty with our new things, and we were all in good spirits and good order. But oh, Hope, isn't pa incorrigible? Could anything ever make him sophisticated — if there is such a word? Did you ever know anything like it? Not merely to spend his money for those horrid pictures, but to tell how much they cost, and that they were second-hand, from an auction, before the Hardings and Gray! — I wouldn't have minded Herbert, for he knows us, — and then to mention that spot on the wall, after all the trouble I'd taken to turn that thousand-eyed old dragon with her back to it! I do declare, it's too much. I sometimes think it's no use trying to be genteel, with such a dear old honest pa."

"I know it's discouraging, Kitty, but I think they were all sensible enough to understand it. Father is so thoroughly good

and straightforward he can afford to be himself, without any airs and graces. Mother, too, shows just what she is, — a plain, country lady, without any pretensions. It is only we, Kitty, who aren't anybody or anything, that have to struggle up the ladder of appearances; and I sometimes think we try a little too hard; but then it's natural for us girls, who have so many wants, and no particular place. How nice it will be to go to the Hardings', and see their beautiful house. I can hardly wait. You must watch, Kitty, and remember everything, so that if we should have company we could do the same in things that would be suited to our style."

"Never fear for me, Hope; nothing escapes me. It is you who dream over things in general, and catch the sentiment, without the special application."

"I know it, Kitty; I was advising myself, as well as you. But come, we must pull down our mattress, and prepare to close our eyes in the midst of all our new magnifi-

cence. What would people say if they knew that our parlor was our bed-room? And yet I dare say that we are not the only people in the world who put the best foot foremost."

We were all in a great state of excitement on Thursday, preparing for our first dinner-party. Kitty went round all the morning with her crimps put up so tightly that she couldn't wink without groaning, and I had a long curl in papers. Mother was pinching and plaiting her best cap and frills, and none of us could settle down to anything. We went at last so as to be there just five minutes before the hour. Father insisted on starting before, and mother was inclined to listen to him; but Kitty was firm, and what she couldn't entirely accomplish by argument she did by strategy, going back after her handkerchief after we were in the street. Indeed, she confided to me as we went along that, sooner than arrive at that countrified hour, she would have fainted and been carried

into a druggist's. I was so glad that it was not necessary. I thought we all looked quite nicely as we paraded round before the full-length glass in the elegant chamber, It is so nice to take a realizing view of one's self! Kitty had on the black silk, trimmed with the remnant of the satin dress, and I a heavy blue watered Irish poplin, that mother used to wear when she was much younger, and slighter in figure. I thought it would be much more stylish than a cheap, new silk, and besides, the money that would cost would trim this with velvet, and the rest, added to Kitty's fund, would get her a very nice one. Mother gave me some old-fashioned real thread lace for my neck and wrists, and Kitty insisted on my wearing the only rose our basket boasted, and said, with my waterfall up high, and my curl, I looked quite aristocratic. I thought if I could look as pretty as she did, I should be satisfied. Mrs. Harding received us very kindly, and Mr. Harding beamed all over. It makes it very inconvenient for a woman

to have a man look so overwhelmed with pleasure at her presence; she has to become a stock or a stone, to preserve the balance. There were only an old gentleman and rather a solemn young one there, and we went almost immediately out to dinner. Mrs. Harding was very kind to me, and told me she had saved me a place by her. I was very glad that papa could be opposite, and the nice old gentleman the other side. How I wished that it could have been Kitty and I instead of Kitty and mother, on each side of Mr. Harding; we could have had such a nice talk.

The affair was conducted with a good deal of ceremony, and we had ever so many courses of things I knew nothing about; but I did as Kitty told me, took a little of each thing, and ate it as if it had been a matter of complete indifference to me, and had been my daily fare. Unfortunately, Mrs. Harding asked me if I liked mushrooms. I was astonished at the question, and told her yes; that I thought they

looked quite pretty growing in the green woods, they were of such bright, soft tints. She smiled, and said that she was speaking particularly of the taste of them; that perhaps I had not noticed those on my plate in the sauce. I was quite crushed, and remembered that I had seen them once on a bill of fare, and that papa said they had them at handsome dinners. I was so glad that Kitty didn't hear me; she would have died of mortification, and I shan't tell her. I don't think myself it was anything to be ashamed of. We have other things to do in the country than to hunt up strange and wonderful things to eat.

My old gentleman then began to tell me about the mushrooms of different countries, and I found out that he had been quite a traveller. Almost all the rest of the dinner was taken up with tales of what he had seen. I was so glad, because I did not have to say anything.

After dinner, Mr. Harding came up to father and me, and asked if we would like

to look at the pictures. Kitty and the nephew who had escorted her from dinner were already strolling around the room, and the rest were sitting in a corner talking; so we joyfully accepted the invitation.

I never saw or dreamed of such paintings before, such cool rivers, and green meadows! such glorious forests, and limpid lakes, and snow-crowned mountains! "I really think, Hope, if I'd seen these before, I shouldn't have bought our new ones," said my father; "they'd be nowhere alongside of these."

"No, father; but we could not afford paintings, and they would not agree with our surroundings. We will be satisfied with photographs and engravings, if we may sometimes have a peep at such as these."

"That's very true," said my father; "and yet nature will be nature everywhere. Look at that brook there; it's no prettier than the one under our trees, and it seems to belong to the old house. If I could only

get one for you like it, Hope, I'd risk the surroundings."

I thought myself that I should be willing to do so, but told papa that we would wait until our ship came in, and we passed on. I was particularly interested in Mr. Harding's private sitting-room, which opened out beyond the elegant library. I had known so few men, — and never any who had united wealth to cultured tastes, — I wanted to see how they would spend for personal comfort and pleasure.

Then, too, Mr. Harding gave one the feeling that there was so much beyond that quiet, gentle exterior, that I could not help a little desire to read a few secrets from his surroundings. He was very kind and patient in telling us about the pictures and their best points, and about the artists who painted them, some of whom he knew. I felt as if I had a little capital to start upon when I looked at others. I could not help wondering at one which he called his favorite. It was a picture of a barn and

farm-yard. The upper half of the door stood open, disclosing the goodly store of grain. Upon the hay-mow, just within the door, stood a lordly cock, surrounded by his hens, looking down contemptuously upon two poor old sheep who stood with meek and patient faces out in the frosty twilight, looking so longingly at the wealth of comfort and shelter so near and yet so far from them. A feeble little lamb was hugging up to its mother's side, as if to gain some warmth and comfort from that unfailing fount of love. The sun was sinking lower and lower behind the cold, blue hills, the ghostly moon looked coldly down upon them; you felt the night creeping on as you looked; it was pitiful beyond measure.

"It is a picture that would wring a woman's heart," said I, struggling with a tear, as he turned to me; "it will do for men. No one says to them, 'You can't come in,' and looking at this might remind them to be patient and kind."

"You seem to think that nothing is denied to the so-styled 'lords of creation,' Miss Hope."

"No, not so much that, Mr. Harding; but it seems to me that there is so little which they cannot secure by patient and persevering effort, while they can never know the feeling of utter helplessness that overcomes a woman, at the thought of being left alone and unprotected."

He looked as if he would like to say something in reply, but instead closed his lips more tightly, and we went on to others. Before very long, Mrs. Harding sent a servant to say that our company was desired in the parlor.

Here we found the others enjoying a cup of tea and some cake. "Those were two interesting young men whom we met at your rooms, Miss Kitty," observed Mrs. Harding, presently. "If I had been sufficiently acquainted, I should like to have invited them to meet you. I know that young ladies enjoy the society of gentle-

men of their own age, and my son and I are rather out of young company."

"My son" put on that peculiar expression which I had observed before. I looked at him again, and began to doubt if he were as much as forty. Kitty answered for us both, "Oh, no, Mrs. Harding; I am sure that we wish nothing of the kind. Hope and I do not depend upon young company, Up in Slab City we think nothing of age, if only it were a *coat* instead of a *petticoat*. You see we get so tired of *all women*, and I've heard Hope say, time and time again, that a man wasn't anybody until he was about thirty-five; an opinion which I do not in the least share with her;" giving a sweet smile in the direction of the stiff youth by her side, who blushed to the roots of his hair at the implied compliment. "I don't quite see how she can say so," continued Kitty, "for Herbert is only two years older than she, and has always been her chief, particular beau." Oh, Kitty, Kitty, Mr. Harding and I couldn't help hearing every

word, and I felt myself growing redder and redder every moment.

"Oh, Herbert is the one who is so tall and fair; a handsome fellow, Miss Hope," and she nodded approvingly at me.

"Herbert has always been just like a brother to us both, Mrs. Harding," said I; but I fancied that Mr. Harding looked keenly at me, and for some reason or other I felt so "flustered," as old Bridget says, that I don't know what I should have done if they had not all risen to take their seats at a whist-table. The old gentleman had departed, and Mr. Harding had to make the fourth at the table, so that Kitty and the youth and I were left to look over a portfolio of engravings, which Mrs. Harding remarked that "young people generally enjoyed." If I might only have had *her son* to tell me about them, I suppose I should.

I wondered if he liked whist!

CHAPTER III.

How the winter slipped away we hardly knew. We were busy all the time. When there was nothing special to do, we all went out, and walked about, looking at the handsome houses, and beautiful public buildings, and at all the knickknacks in the shop windows.

There were always beautiful pictures in the galleries. I felt as if that were our greatest privilege, and once we went into an artist's studio with Herbert. Most of our dissipations were with Herbert. He and Gray would come round and take us to the theatre, or to a concert; it was all wonderful. I liked Gray; he was a pleasant, straightforward fellow, and fell in easily with our ways, although one could see that he was accustomed to very different ones.

We often had very pleasant evenings

when Mr. Harding was there with them, which was frequently the case. Kitty was generally overflowing with fun, and seemed to inspire all the rest; she said it was enough to animate a clod of clay, to have a man and a half apiece sitting in the room; but it didn't affect me so, although I liked it.

About this time, Herbert's father brought home his new wife to Cambridge, and we all went to call upon her, and liked her very much. She was very kind and polite to us, and asked us to her receptions several times. She seemed especially pleased with Kitty, and said that she wished that she could persuade father and mother to let her stay with them the rest of the season, and go into society; but Kitty, though she brightened at the idea, said that she could not leave me.

We had to work pretty hard to get ourselves ready for several occasions. Kitty and I made white tarletans, because they were pretty, and above all, cheap. I could not help thinking that it did not quite pay

for me. I didn't exactly know what to do with myself if I didn't sit in a corner and watch Kitty. She was so full of sparkle and gayety, tripping through the dances which she had so lately learned, and making mistakes with such a pretty air of assurance, chatting the while with her own partner, and throwing out a bright word to every one that she met. It was wonderful to me; it took all my careful attention to get through the figures, and the time was so short that I could not think of anything to say, and the rattle of voices was so great that it drowned all my ideas. It got to be dull, even with Herbert. It seemed to me that I had nothing in common with him in this brilliant life which he was leading, in this gay society of which he was a part.

With Kitty it was so different. They looked beautifully together. He often said, when we were talking, "After all, Hope, there is no one like our Kitty; she is fascinating; I am proud of her; arn't you?" Of course I did not need to answer. I think

that his new mother was pleased to see him with Kitty. I do not think that she thought that he paid me attention from choice, and often when we were sitting down for a few words together, she would come up and say, —

"Now, Herbert, I am going to stay with Miss Hope; she does not seem to care for dancing; run and take Kitty before she is surrounded.' Thus it began to be a matter of course that I walked into the adjacent rooms with certain odd, mateless people, and grew nervous and afraid when I was asked to dance, and said that I would rather look on.

Several times I met Mr. Harding at these gatherings, and then I was always sure of a happy evening. We wandered away into a quiet place, and seemed to find everything to talk about. I should have enjoyed it so much, only Herbert surprised us once or twice, and looked so keenly at me, when he saw my pleased face. Could he think — but, no, such an idea would be too absurd,

— Mr. Harding, a rich and cultured man, with all the world before him from which to choose, and I — who, and what was I? Ah, it was very plain that he, whose goodness shone in every lineament of his face, was only giving from his abounding stores to one so limited in opportunities for acquiring that information which an aspiring nature craves.

Oh, but my heart was very heavy at times! What a world it was; so different from what I had pictured it at home. Kitty seemed to enjoy it, but I felt out of place, and strange. Why was I not like other people? Should I ever have the courage to go away from home again? And, Herbert, what did he think? did he have this feeling when he came from us to mingle in it all? No, I think, like Kitty, he had found his right place, — they were both so full of brightness, — how much they could do together — oh, God! together? and Kitty might have *so many*, and I could have only one. Oh, if we had all of us lived our quiet lives in

Slab City, and had never known of this great world, which could have gone on just as well without us. And yet, Kitty! how I have longed to have her beauty known and appreciated by all these who pass me by! And Herbert, will he not be a great man among these men of whom we read, and to whom we look from afar with reverence as the men of our times, known in all countries? Oh, what have I been dreaming of, I, who have nothing but a life's devotion to offer!

Kitty said to me after we had retired to our room that night: "Hope, I am beginning to open my eyes, and so must you. Mr. Harding doesn't come to these sociables for nothing. Mrs. Clay said, to-night, that she was amazed to see him at these companies; that he never went to this sort of thing. When he isn't stealing off with you to some quiet corner, he has the most pathetic, bored look I ever saw on a man's face."

"Well, the fact is, we're the old folks of

the party, Kit; almost every one else seems to have more taste for general chit-chat than we. I am sure, I depend upon him for all my enjoyment; and we have so many tastes in common that we never seem to get talked out."

"You'd have a famous establishment, Hope, and he'd be real good and loving, always. That old dragon of a mother-in-law, though; she has, as my dear 'Sherry' would say, 'an unforgiving eye and a damned disinheriting countenance.' You'd have to have me live with you to fight your battles; but I wouldn't stop for her, she might die off after a while."

"O Kit! don't talk so! Since you approve so highly, I wonder you don't fascinate him yourself. You know you've nothing to do but to decide; they're sure to fall!"

"Thanks, dear sister, for the compliment, but I couldn't quite do that; he's almost too good. It's not that I do not admire amiable people more than others, and wish to be

like them, and all that, but they always did rub me up the wrong way. Now, I can be quite goody when I'm with people who are disposed to go wrong, and exert what you might call a *moral influence;* but if I lived in the house with a minister, I'm quite sure that I should go back to the old original Adam, that people are accustomed to lay all their sins to; — I should end, by rubbing his nose with his sermons. I know I should! I, — oh, it makes me shudder to think what I might do! Now, you are so different, and I should feel so relieved if you were all settled in life, with everything you wanted, books and pictures, etc. Only think of it, Hope!"

"Well, Kit, if you'll console Herbert."

Kitty gave me a piercing look, which deepened into a smile and blush, when she saw that I smiled also. Yes, I was right, and my little sister agrees with me that some quiet man would be best for me; Herbert is above, beyond me. His wife must be a brilliant woman. And why do I rebel?

Do I not love them both better than myself? I looked into the glass next morning to see if I were pale. No, thank heaven. I have no tell-tale face. I think that I could go to my death without moving a muscle, with my color fair and bright.

We were very busy all the next day, preparing for a party in the evening. Kitty and I were to wear white dresses, with blue trimmings. I had been saving to adorn my hair, a little wreath of forget-me-nots, which I had purchased some weeks before. I could not help thinking, as I selected it, — though it was foolish, — how Herbert would like it, he was so fond of such things, and always liked to see me in blue; but it would have taken away all my courage to have him speak of it that night, so I went and laid it on Kitty's shining braids. She looked like a queen.

"But, Hope," she said, "why do you give me this? I thought you cared so much for it."

"No, Kitty, I've taken a fancy to wear a natural flower to-night; I have a sweet,

white rose that will be just the thing; besides, Herbert will admire you in this."

Kitty stole a pleased look in the glass.

"Well, Hope, to think that ever you should resign Herbert so calmly, even to me! I should have said that you were constancy itself."

"I don't know what you call constancy, Kitty," I said, half angrily. "I never had the chance to resign him; we were never lovers, that I know of."

"Oh, no, not that; but I always supposed, for some reason or other, that you were made for each other. I had a kind of feeling 'in my bones.'"

"You'd better not trust your bones next time. How shall we tie our sashes, Kitty?"

To my surprise, we had a call from Mr. Harding in the morning. He chatted for a while very pleasantly with mother and me, as we sat sewing in the parlor, and, just before he went, asked if he might not call for us that evening, in his carriage, and take us to the party, as it was to be some dis-

tance out of town. Kitty was out. I rather thought that she had planned, the night before, for Herbert to take us, so I told Mr. Harding that I thought we must refuse his invitation. But he said that, at least, I could go with him, and if Kitty went with Herbert, we could meet her there; and if it happened that she had not made the arrangement, she could go with us. I did not know whether it was proper for me to go alone with him, — nothing troubled me so much in Boston as the question about proper things to do. A great many things were thought right there, which the people in Slab City would have been horrified at; and I'm quite sure that Bostonians would find a great many shocking ideas among our innocent inhabitants. That must always be the trouble in changing from one place to another, and I don't suppose there is any help for it. It makes me quite discouraged with life sometimes, to think how many dreadful, dreadful mistakes I must have made quite unconsciously.

I don't think Mr. Harding thinks much about such things, — he has such a natural, simple way with him. Mother didn't help me out any; so when he said that it would be too bad to make him take this long sleigh-ride all alone, I relented, and said I would go, — he had been so kind. He looked so pleased when I said "yes," that I had a kind of guilty feeling, though I didn't suppose that he really cared, — Kitty is so foolish! She came in with Herbert soon after Mr. Harding had gone, and I told them.

"Them that's rich can ride in chaises," said Kitty, whirling round upon one foot, and laughing. "Herbert and I are going in the horse-cars."

"I have half a mind not to go with her at all, Hope, because she will not let me get a carriage; but I can't do anything with her; 'she will, and she won't,' and all I can do is to submit," said Herbert, half petulantly, half admiringly.

"Kitty is quite right, Herbert; we cer-

tainly should not feel at liberty to accept your constant offers of escort under any other conditions. You know us, and we you, and we do not mind the walking any more than you; and to us all the expense would be inconvenient, so what's the use of making believe?"

"I suppose you're right," said Herbert, mournfully. "Well, then, we'll follow our sister's carriage there this evening, most humbly. Good-by till then."

Oh, how I wished that Mr. Harding had asked me to walk. If he were poor, I really think I could admire him; as it is I rather hate him, because he can drive and take me so comfortably. We women are very hard to please, sometimes.

I was so glad that Herbert and Kitty got off before he came. At first, I dreaded the ride very much, and resolved that I would be very cool and indifferent all the way; but when he came it seemed to me he looked sad and abstracted, as if something oppressed him, and he was so silent after we

started that I forgot my resolution, in trying to brighten him up a little. I think that I succeeded, for when we arrived he said that he had enjoyed the drive so much, and only wished that we could keep on, instead of going into that tiresome crowd. I rather wished so, too, if only Kitty and Herbert had been with us, but I did not think it would be the thing to say so.

After we went down-stairs I resolved to make a great effort to be agreeable, and to go about as much as possible with other people, and, to my surprise, I succeeded so well, that I hardly had an opportunity to speak to Mr. Harding or Herbert all the evening. Herbert whispered to Kitty that he supposed I was too grand to have anything to do with them now, and, of course, arranged that I should overhear him. I was beginning to look around for Kitty to ask her if we had not better think of going, when Mr. Harding came up and begged me to walk through the conservatory with him, as there was a most beautiful display of

flowers. I did not care much for flowers, or indeed, anything, but I could not refuse, and the air was so delicious, and everything so fresh and beautiful, that it seemed to lift the burden from my heart a little. I was saying that it had always been a great desire of mine to have a little room of flowers, when he turned suddenly round, and said, —

"But there are some who would be happy with much less than that. All that I would ask, Miss Hope, would be the little white rose in your hair."

I stopped, breathless and amazed. So it had come, after all, but I could not, dared not, think of it here in the midst of so many; so I only laughed, and said, —

"How cruel, Mr. Harding, to wish to take away the only ornament which I wear this evening."

"You do not need it," he replied, quietly, "and it would be so much to me;" and just then Mrs. Clay came to find me, to say that Kitty and Herbert had been looking every-

where for me, and had just gone, as they were obliged to catch the last car.

I felt as if I were abandoned to my fate, and turned imploringly to Mr. Harding, saying, "Let us go, too;" so we hastened to bid our adieux.

Oh, if I could have gone home with Herbert and Kitty! What should I do? If I had only been more careful! I trembled so that I could hardly step into the sleigh. I knew that the door was shut, and that we were whirled away over the creaking snow into the darkness, but all was a blank until I heard his voice saying that he had loved me ever since he met me that day in the cars, and a great, great deal more. I could do nothing but cry as if my heart would break, but as soon as I could speak I begged him to stop, for that much as I had enjoyed being with him, I could never, never love him as he wished, and it was terrible to lose as a friend one whom we all had thought so much of.

He was silent for a moment, and then

said, brokenly, "Will you not give me a hope for the future? I know that I have been too sudden."

I said, "No, Mr. Harding; it is only right to tell you that which I have never breathed to any one, hardly to myself; but now, when you offer me your love, it is made so plain to me that there is another love which has grown to be a part of my being, and which makes all other seem poor in comparison."

He took my hand, and kissed it, and said, "Heaven give him all the happiness which I hoped would be mine, and to you a thousand times more."

"No," I said, "Mr. Harding, happiness is not for me, save that which comes from the renunciation of it. There are reasons why I could not marry the one I love. I do not indeed know that he cares for me; but that will make no difference."

He leaned back in the carriage and sighed deeply, and for a long time we drove through the streets in silence; but as

we neared home it came over me that perhaps he might never want to see us again. How kind he had been! And this was all the return I could make; so I asked him to forgive me, and told him how sorry I was that I had not been wiser, like Kitty, that I might have prevented it all. But he smiled a little, and said that he would not have had anything different; that there would always be more pleasure than pain in his remembrance of our intercourse, and if I really wanted to do something for him, would I try to forget what had passed, and let him be my friend, as he had been before? He was going to Europe in a few days, — he has decided to go very suddenly, — and when he came back I should be gone. Then my father and mother had invited him and his mother to make us a visit some time, he had become attached to them; it would be so pleasant if we could meet on the same footing. And I told him that I could not bear that my dear father and mother, who thought so much of him,

should know that he cared for me, or even Kitty, so we agreed that everything should go on as it had before; and he said a few little things which I shall always remember, they were so kind and noble. Ah, how unworthy I felt of the love and friendship of such a man. I did not know him before; I had looked too much at the outward form.

Kitty came in, overflowing with life and spirits. "What, Hope, in bed already? You aren't sleepy, are you? I must turn the gas up, and take a look at myself. Didn't I look better than usual to-night? I thought people looked as if I did, not to mention Herbert, who remarked that my wreath was touching! We did have such a nice time coming home. How did you get on in your grandeur? He didn't propose, did he?"

"Kitty!"

"Well, Hope, they do it suddenly, sometimes; I'm sure, I don't see why he shouldn't. House all ready; ma, too. What did he say? Did you flirt any?"

"He said he was going to Europe Saturday, — a sudden decision; he should try to find time to come in and say good-by."

"Well, if that isn't too much; the *old, settled-down thing!* Now there won't be any more fun with you! Why didn't you weep a little, Hope, when he told you? A tear or two might have brought him round. Didn't he ask you to write? Oh, what fun to correspond with a lover in Europe! what artless letters one might write, referring indirectly to mosaics, camel's-hairs, &c.; and then the coming home; the bliss of reunion after such a separation; the unpacking of trunks, &c., &c. Oh, Hope, if I only stood in your shoes;"and Kitty, pretty and glowing, sat down on the edge of the bed to unbraid her hair, having deposited her frills and furbelows carefully over the back of the sofa.

"Hope, do you realize that our visit here is nearly over? And I do so hate to go home. Oh, how nice it is to dress, and dance, and go with people you like, and

see pretty things, and live just as you feel that you were born to. I do love home, and some day I shall long for it, but not quite yet. I have been hungry for this too long, and haven't got half filled yet."

"I know it, Kitty. It seems a pity you should go. I've been going to tell you that you must accept Mrs. Clay's invitation, and let us go without you. You needn't mind my going; I really don't want to stay. I've had enough, and I am one of the homesick kind; I shall be so glad to go, and you can write us of all your doings, and it will be as good as if we were here, and better. I'm sure I had rather read about things than be in them."

"Would you, really? Well, perhaps, it's different for you, now your beau is going away."

Kitty had put out the gas by this time, and crept into bed; her soft arms were round me, her head on my shoulder. Oh, if I might have cried just a little; I had never kept any secrets from my sister, but

if I told her now, she might ask me questions, and these I could not bear.

I kissed her, softly, and told her, laughing, — for I must either laugh or cry, — that she was my only beau; that I should stay an old maid, that I might live with her.

"Then you do not care for Mr. Harding's going away. I fancied, dear, you looked a little troubled, and I knew" — here Kitty gave me a convulsive clasp, and buried her face in my bosom.

"Knew what, darling?"

It was a moment before the whispered words came, "Knew — what — I should feel if it were Herbert that was going."

My darling, darling sister, so it was indeed true. We lay very quiet for a long time. At last Kitty raised her head.

"Hope, I don't know what to think of myself for saying this, for Herbert has never breathed a word — and it does not seem possible that he could love me as well as you, who are so sweet, so good, so much more worthy. If men were not given to

being so foolish about such things, I should never dream of it. I always used to think of him as my brother; but, since we have been here, he and I seem, quite unconsciously, to have paired off. I don't know why, but it all comes so naturally."

What could I do but fold her closer in my arms, and kiss her again and again? Words would have been worse than useless. It was not long before her regular breathing told me that she had fallen asleep. I held her in my arms all night; it seemed, somehow, as if she had slipped away from me. Oh, how happy we had been together in the old home, the old life; and now how uncertain and troubled it all looked in the future. There was only One who knew how it all would end; to Him I prayed for a safe deliverance from all our trials, and if there could be love and happiness for but one, that it might be for Kitty; I could get along better than she without it.

A week later, and our rooms were dismantled. Mother and I were going home;

Kitty was to visit Mrs. Clay, and father would remain but a few weeks longer. Mrs. Harding came in, the evening before we left, and promised us a visit in the early summer, on the way to some springs which had lately been discovered, just beyond us, and which promised great relief to her ailments. Her son had spent an hour with us one evening, when he came to say good-by. Herbert happened to be in, and one or two others, and we were a merrier party than usual, which I thought very fortunate. Father and mother urged him most cordially to visit them upon his return, which he promised to do. I trusted that it would not be very soon. Father and Kitty and Herbert escorted us to the train, early as it was. I was glad to be off, though it was hard to leave father and Kitty, from whom I had never been separated before. I felt so tired and unable to think; it was such a relief to lean back in the cars, and not say anything. As we came out of the city, I turned and looked back, remembering

how I had come to it, nearly three months before, and who it was that had sat by my side. How different it all was; everything looked so bleak and cold on this dull March morning; he was far away upon the ocean, and I so desolate here. I could not keep my tears from falling thick and fast. No one saw me. Mother was in front, asleep. Oh, how strangely everything had turned out. Everything was changed to my saddened heart. I was weary of the long car-ride, and dreaded to meet the people who would fill the seats of the old stage, some of whom would probably know me, and ask if I enjoyed my visit in the city.

The twilight was deepening as we drew near home. The stage ride had been slow and tedious, on account of the heavy roads. The air had the balmy softness which comes sometimes to a March evening, when winds are weary, and rest for a while from vexing the patient earth. The road had left the mountain-tops during the last few miles, and on the sheltered sides of the

hills the trees wore the red brown tint that tells of buds swelling with the promise of the spring. Out from the dry leaves on the roadside peeped the fresh, green arbutus leaves. I know just where to go to find the fragrant blossoms, a little later. Oh, how sweet was the thought of wandering once more in the dim pine-woods; it seemed as if every care and sorrow must melt away.

How can any one be happy, to live in a city, away from so many comforters? We saw the home light at last, as we drove down the wide street. The driver cracked his whip gaily as we rounded the corner, and the few passers-by turned and looked to see where the stage was going to stop. Old Ponto pricked up his ears as he sat on the doorsteps, and when Tim and Hannah put out their heads, he seemed to think that he might relax his dignity a little, and came down to the gate on a trot, somewhat modified by age and steady habits. Dear old square-nosed puppy-dog, with the solemn, soulful eyes, and the little, old-fashioned

yellow body, set on four crooked legs. I didn't see anything half so lovely in all Boston.

We were fairly carried into the house by our devoted assistants, and there was the fire burning on the hearth, and Pussy on the rug, enjoying it all. Everything had such a dear and familiar look. There was the little square mirror, with the gilt eagle hovering over the top of it; the old silver candlesticks; and grandpa and grandma in their frames, looking down upon us; and the old chintz lounge; and the chairs, no two alike, but each one with a history; and the desk where father always sat; and the Pembroke table, with the solar lamp upon it. Oh, if Kitty had been there, it would have been quite perfect, — dear, happy Kitty! It seemed strange to sit down, just we two; but, one by one, the neighbors dropped in, to give us a shake of the hand, and welcome us back again, so that our coming should not be lonely. The peace and comfort of our little room up

stairs were almost too much for me, — Kitty's and my room, that we had been so fond and proud of ever since we were little girls. Here we had hung up our first pictures, — two prints from some magazines, "Old Times in Broadway," and "Coming to Get Married," framed in a plain band of varnished wood.

How pleased we had been when mother gave us a high mahogany bedstead, that had been a part of her wedding portion. It was hung with embroidered muslin curtains, trimmed with a broad fringe, which were looped up at intervals all round with rosettes. Now, as I lay down under the snowy drapery, it seemed as if I had never been away, as if all the past had been but a troubled dream, and that Kitty and I should wake up together in the morn, and go on living the old life, with its quiet pleasures, and bright dreams of the future. We should go walking down the green lane to the brook, talking of the summer-time that was coming, and Herbert's vacation.

Ah, then I knew by the sharpness of my pain that I could dream no more. I put my hand out on the pillow, but Kitty was not there; she had left me, and Herbert, and that other poor heart, sailing away over the sea, and life had begun for me alone, alone!

CHAPTER IV.

THE spring months passed quickly by us. We did not have many idle moments, mother and I, there was so much to be done. As she said, "things did have a different look, coming fresh from Boston." The parlor carpet was dreadfully worn, and we had to turn the breadths every which way, to make them respectable. The chintz curtains which had formerly draped the best bed, were to be made into chair-coverings, to cover the gloom of hair-cloth, which had become hateful in our

eyes since we had lived in a boarding-house. Then we decided to cut over our long parlor curtains into lambrequins, which was quite an undertaking. I was busily at work upon them one sultry morning in May, while mother was house-cleaning, up stairs. I had been thinking, even more than usual, of Kitty, from whom we had not heard for a week past. She had stayed on and on with the Clays, — they would not let her go, — and father had returned some weeks since, alone. I had begun to long so for her.

Now, as I thought of her, I could not stay there sewing. I laid down my work, and ran out to the front door. I saw the coach stop, down on the green, and the driver throw off the mail-bag. Perhaps there might be a letter. I took my hat and went down. A few moments sufficed to sort the scanty mail. There were two letters for us; one was from Kitty. I came home, and sat down on the doorstep to read it. Oh, how well I remember every word.

I could repeat it to-day, but not without a pang, happy as I am. It was a beautiful letter, brimming over with a young girl's great happiness; Herbert loved her, had loved her for a long time, and they were coming home in a week or two, that he might ask her of us all.

Why was it that, knowing it all as I had done this long time, it came upon me with the shock of unexpectedness? Oh, my little sister, had I not given him up entirely?

The air seemed very close and faint, the glare of the sunshine was intolerable. Oh that it were night, that I might lie down and rest, away from the curious eyes that seemed to fill the air about me. I ran up to my room, wondering what I could do next, and then I remember kneeling down, and laying my head in the old arm-chair, and saying, half aloud, "Oh, God! Herbert engaged, and not to me! Oh, God help me." I felt somehow as if I must pray, but for what? I wanted nothing, cared for nothing, dreaded nothing. A strange quiet

came over me, as if I were in the world, yet not of it. Everything seemed hushed and far off. If only it could have grown dark! What should I do in all the long, day before me? it was so bright. I said it over two or three times, it sounded so strangely in the stillness of the room: "Herbert loves Kitty, and not me! Oh God, oh God, what shall I do all the rest of my long life?"

I do not know how long I sat there on the floor, smoothing my own little hands one with another. Herbert always said that they were the kind that a true knight would die to kiss, they were so delicate and beautiful, and that they showed good birth and breeding. Herbert always cared for such things. I never knew that they were small or pretty until he told me. Kitty's were even prettier than mine. Ah, well! I wonder, when people are drowning, do all these things come to them after the first struggle? I could have gone on folding and unfolding them forever, and thinking

these things, if I had not heard mother's voice, as she descended the garret stairs, dropping the broom and dustpan, and talking to herself all the way. Then I started and ran down stairs; I could not give her the letter yet. I was sewing busily on the curtains, when she came in and sank breathless on a chair.

"Well, the garret is done at last. I think that two days more up stairs, and one day on the curtains, will put us quite in order for the summer. I am glad, for the warm weather seems to have come early this season; it is really quite oppressive to-day. Have you been sewing all the morning, my dear? You must be tired. I will help you this afternoon, and we will have them finished off. Seems to me you look a little pale; I cannot have you in the house so much. I don't think you have ever looked as well, since you went to Boston. Kitty, now, seems to grow fat on it; and I used to like being up nights when I was a girl. How your father and I used to dance! But

some can't do it. It's fortunate you aren't much tempted here. You and mother must settle down together, and let Kitty do the running about. I think father and I ought to keep one daughter with us; don't you think so, pa?"

Father, who had just come in from the yard, stooped over and patted my cheek.

"We can't spare either of them, Bessy. I mean to begin to be hard on any young fellow that comes round. Herbert's got rather the start of me. I shall have to look after him pretty close. I wonder why we don't hear from Kitty."

How the letter burned in my pocket! Was it really there, or was this but a fearful dream, a nightmare, from which I must in time awake?

A week later, and we were all on the steps, just before tea, awaiting the arrival of the stage, with Herbert and Kitty, and his father and mother, who were to spend a day or two with us on their way to New York. Kitty's engagement was now an

established fact, and everybody was greatly excited over it. It was a great while since we had had an engagement in high life in Slab City.

I had handed the letter quietly to father and mother, as they sat together on the side porch in the twilight, and had left them to themselves and gone down to the pine knoll.

It seemed a long time before I saw mother coming down the path to me, with her apron thrown over her head. Her glasses were quite dim with tears, and when she saw me she put out her arms, and we both wept together.

"It's so sudden, dear," was all she could say for a time; "you've read her letter, and pa told me to give you his. A real manly letter it is, and one it would be hard to say no to, even supposing we didn't know him so well as we do. But I always thought it was my Hope that he took to. I suppose it's all right, dear; you've arranged it between you, but I didn't think of Kitty."

"Oh, ma, what bright eyes you've had

all this winter. I've seen it ever so long. He has been perfectly devoted to Kitty at all the parties, and they make such a splendid pair. I am too quiet and prosy for such a brilliant man as Herbert is going to be; I shall stay at home with my father and mother. Will you keep me, mother, always?"

"My darling! as if mothers were not always too selfishly willing to keep their children; always, dear, until the right one comes along. God forbid that mother should keep you from what has been her happiness in life, her husband and children."

Well, as I began to say, we were out on the steps when we heard the rattle of the wheels in the distance. I thought that the old home must look lovely to Kitty and Herbert, that night. The apple-trees were not yet out of bloom, for our spring had been late, and now everything that was beautiful and sweet had been poured down upon us together. I had gathered the first

cinnamon rose that morning, with a bit of syringa, from the sunny corner by mother's bed-room window. Lilies of the valley filled the air with their fragrance, and all across the flower-sprinkled grass the shadows of the elms lay soft and dark; it was only a few weeks since the shadows had come with the unfolding of the leaves.

Of course we had talked of nothing but Herbert and Kitty all the week. Mother had got as far as furnishing the house for them, and had been up in the garret at her old black trunk, counting the home-made linen sheets that she had laid by for her daughters. Curious, kindly neighbors came and went, many openly wondering that it was Kitty, and not I; and I heard it, and smiled, and talked with them, wondering inwardly that I cared nothing for it all. Sometimes a word would strike sharp and keen in some little uncovered place, but the pain was soon over, and I seemed to feel it as little as the spiritless clay, lying low, heeds the dull rattle of earth upon its coffin-

lid, which sends such a pang to the heart of the mourner.

Kitty was at home again; that was all to me. I saw father take her carefully from the stage, pushing Herbert aside, with the words, "Go to your mother, my boy."

Then she came to me, and Herbert, too, and of the rest I have but a dim remembrance, until I found myself taking Mrs. Clay up into the front chamber. Then I looked into ours; Kitty was there.

"Are you glad to be at home again, darling, in the old house?"

"Oh, Hope, and with you! Dear, you were the only one not astonished. How did they take it? Ah, if you could only be as happy as I. That is all I have to ask now; you will be, you must be."

"I shall always be happy, dear, if you are happy; but I must leave you, and run away to help Hannah a little with the tea. Now that we have such grand folks from the city, I must work a little 'behind the scenes.' Do you think we look nice?

Herbert will not be ashamed of our plain ways before his stylish father and mother?"

"Foolish girl! If he were, I would disown him. If there is one thing that I'm prouder of than my good looks, which you know are my fortune and strong point, Hope, it is my dear father and mother, and sister, and my home, if you'll excuse my putting you all together, and calling you one thing. Wait a minute, and let me come with you; you are not to make company of me."

A country tea is such a pretty meal. Our old mahogany table shone like a mirror, reflecting the delicate china of our ancestors, the snowy napkins, plates piled high with feathery biscuit, and golden butter, and snowy mounds of cottage cheese, and nut-brown oly-koeks, and 'lection cake, the real Hartford kind. It was not time yet, up in the country, for berries to ripen, though Kitty said she had had them several times; but the golden quinces, from our own bushes, preserved in what mother con-

sidered the only respectable way, pound for pound, were fresh and delicious as the daintiest palate could desire. Herbert was in his gayest humor, and praised and made his mother taste of everything on the table, saying that his Kitty was to grow up into her mother's accomplishments, and that sometime they were going to have a house with everything in it just like this.

When tea was done, he insisted upon taking us all out to the pine-knoll to see the sunset, and though mother talked a little about "spring dampness," from a motherly kind of habit that she had, yet she put on her shawl, and we all went. Kitty and Herbert would naturally stray away a little from us, running down to the brook's edge for the tiny blossoms that leaned over to look into the water, and for the fragrant white violets that nestled in moist places. They all went to adorn Kitty. There was a knot of them in her bosom, a wreath on her shining braids, her hands were full; she looked like a May Queen. It was a sweet

picture to look down upon, as we sat there under the pines. They joined us at last, and we all watched silently the sinking of the sun behind the hills; then, when the glow had died away, we turned our faces to the eastern cliffs, still rosy with the last rays, and strolled quietly homeward in the soft evening air. Around the old well, that stood in the west yard, we gathered, for a moment. Mrs. Clay had not seen a well-sweep since she was a girl, and Herbert wanted to draw up a bucket of the sparkling water for her to drink from. As we stood there, and it came slowly up, I put out my hand to push it over to his side, and my little ring — the ring that he found in the cake and gave me — shone brightly against the dark wood. It caught his eye.

"Ah, Hope, you'll have to give me back my ring, or Kitty will be jealous. It will never do for you to be wearing it around, with such an air of calm possession."

How still my heart stood for a moment. It had never occurred to me that any one

would want that, would think of it at all, — the one little link of the past that was left to me. It was all that I could do to swallow down the throbs in my throat that would rise and choke me. I do not know what I should have said, but Kitty spoke out of the wealth of her happiness, —

"Hope shall keep her ring if she wants it, and I think that I would even give her you, too, if she asked me. Do not plume yourself upon my jealousy?" with a look of merry defiance.

But Kitty's eyes rested upon the ring, and there was a tone in her voice that said, "but she does not, she cannot want it as I do, to whom everything connected with you is so precious." During the two or three minutes that they were drinking, my thoughts were in a tumult.

"Kitty, he has given you one ring, he will give you another; you would not care greatly for this, you have so much. If you did not see it, you would soon forget it, but I never shall, I never can! I should go wild to see

it upon your finger, — worn, in your joy, before my very eyes. I will give you everything, everything else, — love, life — for love is life; but may I not keep just this, only this, — no, not keep it myself, but put it away out of sight, where no one shall have it?" I could not keep my restless fingers from turning it round and round, as I thought. It had grown quite large for me, lately; suddenly, it slipped off, and down over the mossy stones into the well. They saw it fall.

"O Herbert!" cried Kitty, "it is gone! What were you doing with it, Hope? But don't look so pale and frightened, and I'll forgive you for losing it, and you shall have another, sometime, from us both."

We all leaned over the edge and tried to look down through the still water, but it was too deep; we turned away, and went round through the garden to the house.

Everything was so sweet and quiet in the evening twilight. The whippoorwill's plaintive cry stole up from the distance, a wake-

ful robin twittered from his nest; — Kitty was the happy, sheltered robin, and I the wandering whippoorwill. But, oh, that trouble should make me so selfish; that ever I could have denied anything to my sister!

Herbert's father and mother spent but a day or two with us, and he himself could remain only a week. We spent that time in a round of pleasure, — drives, picnics, and tea-drinkings. Oh, how happy Kitty was! I thanked God every day for it. I did not pray that I might be; I did not want to be. It grew to be a strange thing to me that ever I should have thought of happiness in connection with myself.

A kind of calm crept over my spirit, like the hush that comes after a heavy shower, — an utter stillness, — when Nature seems to pause, when drops have ceased to fall, and leaves hang motionless, and the air is thick and faint, and there is no sun, no life in anything; and the poor weary thing that used to beat so gladly in my breast, with all

its vain hopes and longings, crept away, and wrapped itself in that deathlike peace, — as in a garment, — and was not disturbed by any outward thing.

After Herbert's departure, our excursions came to an end, and the whole household wakened to a new and busy life. We lived in Kitty, and in "Kitty's things." Great boxes came from Boston, and yards and yards of material were torn up, and interested neighbors came and went with patterns and books of styles, and girl-friends passed the afternoons, and busied their nimble fingers with hems of dainty ruffling, and the latest clover-leaf in tatting. Later still, Miss Tabitha Treadwell, the head of the fashionable world in Bloomingdale, came to spend several days and superintend the dresses, while our own Miss Betsy, who had cut everything for us since we wore pantalettes, withdrew a little into the shade, and acted as second, as she frankly confessed, that "when it come to cuttin' clothes to go to furrin' parts, she hadn't the courage

to use her shears." For it was all settled. Herbert was to graduate in June, and they were to be married in September, and go immediately "abroad" to spend a year, at least.

To think of our Kitty going abroad! It seemed wonderful! No one had ever been from our part of the country excepting a missionary to the Sandwich Islands, long ago, when grandma was young. We teased her to tell us about it, and all of us got to crying when it came to her leaving her friends and country, but then, as grandma said, she was going among heathens and savages, with every prospect of being eaten alive, whereas Kitty would see kings and queens, and visit palaces, in company with rich people from Boston and New York, which made it quite a different thing. The ocean was very wide, though, and so terrible; what should we do, with Kitty on the farther side? Would Herbert make up to her for the loss of us all, and home?

CHAPTER V.

IT was towards the last of June that Mrs. Harding wrote that she would like to make us the promised visit. She said that she anticipated with pleasure meeting us all again, and she also wished to visit a new spring which had been lately discovered in our neighborhood, and which was said to be wonderful for rheumatism. A large hotel had been built there, which had drawn many guests the previous summer.

How I dreaded her visit. Kitty said "she was coming to see *how I would do!*" Oh, dear, if Kitty only knew! I told her that if she loved me, she must adopt Mrs. Harding, and take her about everywhere, and this, she, laughing, promised to do, "as her behavior made no difference in her prospects." The first day after her arrival we spent in great trepidation, lest things should

not go on well, but after that, we did not mind. Some people are very different out of their own houses, when they have not the mental and moral support of fine surroundings. It is astonishing what an effect large rooms and lofty ceilings and mirrors and soft carpets have upon one's feelings and general style. As Kitty says, it is quite impossible to put on a regal air, and sail round much in our rooms. In the first place, the floors are not quite level, the house is so old; your foot strikes before you expect it. And then, it is almost impossible to get the hay even under the carpet, and, too, one somehow feels rather sensible and settled down, in the presence of curtains and furniture, with such an experience of life written upon their worn and faded surfaces.

Mrs. Harding seemed like a new person. I was conscious that nothing escaped her eyes; but her manner was so kindly, and she seemed so much interested in all our little plans that, in the course of a week,

she became quite one of us. Kitty had exhibited all the *trousseau*, and we had discussed with her all the plans for the wedding, receiving a great many valuable hints in return. She was never weary of going down to the pine-knoll to sit, and we would all take our sewing and spend a long summer's morning there, listening to the babble of the brook which ran below, and the soft murmur of the wind in the trees.

Sometimes, when we two were alone, — which she seemed to like best, — she would, after sitting silent for a time, tell me little things about her early life, and marriage, and troubles, and I learned that she, whom I thought so cold, had loved as fondly, had been as innocent and gay, as any girl of us all. How strange it seemed, that care and trouble and wrecked ambition, and the every-day dust of life's long journey should cover so completely, in time, such a nature as hers had been. To think that it might happen to Kitty or me!

"You think me a garrulous old woman,

Hope," said she; "I see every day, in your eyes, surprise that I am what I am, but also I see the warm sympathy that leads me to confide in you. If only I had had a daughter, or sister, how different it all would have been. You cannot tell how your life here has brought back the olden time to me, — my young days, when I lived with my father and mother; in the country, an only child. I feel, sometimes, as if it might all come back to me, if I stayed here in the midst of everything that is so beautiful in nature, and among hearts that are so kind and true."

Mrs. Harding was delighted with the house at the Springs, and it was decided that she should return to Boston, and prepare for a three months' stay. She begged me to accompany her there, saying that she dreaded the journey, and the staying alone at her house, and that I did not look well, and needed the change. So it was decided that I should go, especially as it was a good opportunity to do a little shopping for Kitty.

This time the birds were singing sweetly, and the merry sun looked at us over the hill-tops, as we started upon our journey; but, oh, the difference! Now, there was nothing to look forward to any more but a dull round of daily life, and the bearing, as best I could, the eating pain, that seemed, little by little, to wear away all the life that was in me.

The week of my stay with Mrs. Harding slipped quickly away. In many respects the change was a great relief. The daily life was such a contrast to everything that I had known, *that* the old habits of thought and action seemed to belong to some remote time. But in their place came the troubled face of my friend. I walked up and down the rooms where he had passed so much of his life, ate at his table, and feasted my longing eyes on the pictures that he had selected with so much care. Everything spoke to me of him. His mother talked, as mothers will, of all that John did and said, dwelling upon it with a tender pride. She

even took me into his room, and showed me all his little things, the chair where he sat, the books he read, while I followed on with a most guilty feeling. If I had never seen him I should have felt interested in one of whom I heard so many kind and pleasant things, and oh, to feel that I had been the means of giving him all the pain which another had given me, — no, rather which I had taken upon myself. Ah, no! suffer as he might, he could never feel the misery that I felt! It seems to be thought such a terrible thing for a woman to love a man, unasked, even though she whisper it only to her own heart.

There is a queer old maid at home, who lives in a little, mossy, brown house, all by herself. You see her very seldom. She flits about her door-yard in the spring, trimming her rosebushes. Once, when I peeped in through the fence, she gave me a bud. She did not know how often in the years to come, I should think of her. I carried it home to grandma, and

asked her why she lived there by herself. Grandma pursed up her lips: "Because she got a cross in love, child. She took a desprit fancy to some young sprig who boarded to her pa's; — her pa kept the tavern then. She was a pretty girl, with red cheeks and snappin' black eyes, and he hung round her, kinder soft like, and she thought he was sure to marry her, and the ground wan't good enough for her to step on. Wall, she went off for a little while to look after somebody who was sick, and afore she come back, he was gone, and not a word did she hear from, or about him, — for news didn't travel much in those days, and folks was all took up with the war, — till one day the stage came in, an' down he gets from it, handing a young thing, all smiles and blushes, that he said was his wife. Love stood there! Love Root was her name; and they said an icicle couldn't ha' been any colder and stiller. She went in, and sat at the foot of the table, — for the dinner was just comin' in for the passen-

gers, — and helped to all the things, just the same as usual, and, after dinner, they went on. But no one ever see'd a bit of color in her cheeks since, and she never talked and fooled round, — with a word for all the young folks, — as she used to. Many a man 'ud ha' given his eyes to get her, and the neighbors talked till they was tired, but she just lived on with her pa till he died, and then come and took that little house, and got her old bed-rid aunt to live with her; she didn't have much trouble to do that, — nobody else wanted to take care of her. Many's the time I've told her she was flyin' in the face o' Providence; she as might ha' done so well. It was right sinful to keep one's heart fixed on some one who didn't care a pin for her, — and was somebody else's husband into the bargain, — and spend all her strength on an old woman who might be right comfortable at the town-farm."

"And what did she say, grandma?"

"Why, she just looked at me with those

great black eyes, and says, 'But the one I married would grow old, Mrs. Reynolds, and I shouldn't care for him until he did. I love old people; I dread young ones, — they are so happy, and hard, and prosperous; unless it is the little children, — they are like old people, — life is too great for them.'"

It all came back to me so, as I saw her falter up the aisle on Sunday, in the old sprigged-muslin, and worked shawl, and skimpy bonnet. I had always looked upon her as so far removed from any of us. How near she seemed, now. I longed to take that thin hand, which I had so often watched, in its black-lace mitt, lying on the hymn-book, — to kiss and warm the poor pale thing into life once more. Were she and I the only ones, of all around us, who had felt the same trouble? What would grandma say, if she knew? Must I grow old, and withered, and desolate, and live by myself?

It was always different in books. Those

whose sorrows I had wept over so many times, — Lady Harriet Byron, and poor Amanda Fitzalan, — were happy at last. Those whom they loved were never married to any one else. Was it never so in real life? Ah, if Miss Love and I could only be happy; and Mr. Harding, too! I think the only comfort I have is that men are so much wiser about their hearts than women; and he has lived so much longer than I, — for he must be as much as thirty-five, — and has seen a great deal of the world, it does not seem as if he could have been so foolish as to venture all his hopes on my loving him. Mrs. Harding, I know, would never dream of such a thing, and, after he has been with her a little while, he will not. She is so kind that I am almost fond of her, though I had just as lief not be. As Kitty says, "one doesn't feel at liberty to encourage any feelings toward the *mothers* of *sons*." One day she asked me to go with her and buy a wedding-present for a friend, and we went into the most beautiful

shops that I ever had seen. She made me advise her a great deal, saying that she did not know what young people liked. At last we decided upon a cake-basket, which was very handsome, and cost a great deal. I only wished that Kitty could have one like it for her house. Then we looked about for my gift for her, and found the most beautiful little engraving, at a place where Mrs. Harding said she could get things at cost. This enabled me to make my little sum go a great ways. I did not like to ask father for any more, for we had spent so much during the winter, that it quite frightened me to think of it, yet I did so want a pretty picture, that Kitty could hang in the room, and look at every day. When we were at home together, in the quiet afternoon, she took me up-stairs into her room, and asked me if I did not want to help her to look over her drawers. It was only too much pleasure for me, both because I wanted to do something for her, and because it was interesting to look into

the stores of some one who had such lovely things lying about, as if they were of no worth. She laid a little, half-worn lace collar on my hand, saying that perhaps it would come in fashion again, if I cared to keep it, and when I told her that I did not care whether it did or not, — that I should always love to have it, because it had been hers, — she seemed quite touched, and did not say any more for some minutes. Then she took out some very valuable things, and told me all about them, and who gave them to her. Among them were some of her wedding-gifts, and, carefully treasured, the trifles that "John" had given her upon her birthdays, from the time when he was a little bit of a boy. A thoughtful, loving little fellow he must have been. I should have cared more for these than for all the rest, if I had been his mother. She seemed pleased when I told her so, but said that most people would call us two foolish women. All the things together filled a large trunk; she put them in, and locked it, and leaned

wearily back in her chair for a moment, then said, —

"Hope, shall you remember any of these things that I have told you?"

I knew that I should remember; I always had a wonderful memory for such things. I can tell the history of every old spoon, and china cup, and chair, and bookcase, that ever came down to us, and of all the satin pelisses, and worked frills that belonged to my grandmother's five sisters. They are all quite distinct in my mind, — the poor thing who died so young, and the one whose lover was killed by the Indians, and the beautiful one who eloped, and the others who lived and died so quietly upon the hill-tops, — and I often think that I shall know them all as soon as I get to heaven, and perhaps they will be glad that I have cared for their poor little belongings, because they once delighted in them.

Mrs. Harding seemed satisfied when I told her this, and said: "Hope, if anything should happen to me, John will marry; that

is, I think he would, though he has never seemed to care for any one yet. If you should outlive me, and he should do this, I should like his wife, Hope, to have these things. She will be nearer to me than any one else, because she loves my son, and perhaps she will think kindly of me because I am his mother. I should like her to know about these, — will you tell her? I will put it in my will that you are to do so."

What could I do but promise? Somehow it took all the heart out of me, being with this lonely woman. I was so lonely myself, and he was lonely, I was sure. Would he ever marry?

I did want to be a comfort to this poor mother, but I didn't quite know how. Nobody, I knew, could comfort me; so I only took her hand in mine, and we sat quietly till the gas was lighted.

When the time came for me to go, she came into my room with a large box, asking me if I would put it in my trunk, and not open it until I reached home; and if Kitty

and I would accept the few trifles which it contained, some of which had been hers, which she never should need again; adding, half apologetically, that as she had no daughters, she should consider Kitty and me in that light, and mothers always gave their little ornaments to their daughters, as they laid them by.

Kitty and I opened the box eagerly, for we had never had many gifts that came from the city, and there inside was the cake-basket, a wedding-gift, with her card, and several yards of beautiful lace, which she told me had been sent her from Europe, marked, "To trim the wedding-dress." Mother had a handsome dress-cap, and the little inside box which bore my name contained almost everything that I had admired and wanted, — a beautiful, old-fashioned necklace, a richly carved Chinese fan, a little lace cape, and some gloves and flowers for me to wear as bridesmaid. Oh, to think that I could do so little for her in return. How kind, how good she had been to me.

I wonder if it could be that she knew about her son, and was grateful to me for not taking him from her.

When, a week later, she left our house to go to her new rooms at the Springs, she petitioned to have mother with her there for the first few days, saying that she should be lonely at first. We were so pleased to have mother go, it was all so new to her. Mrs. Harding looked quite surprised when I said that none of us had ever, I thought, stayed at a hotel. I suppose that people who live out in the world, and travel, do it a great deal. I didn't tell Kitty that I said so, for I knew she would tell me that I had made another *faux pas*, a French expression which she picked up in Boston, which seems to mean everything improper and dreadful. It never occurred to me that it was a surprising fact, until I saw it in Mrs. Harding's face.

The week after, she sent for Kitty, and then for me, saying that it was a good change for us. I knew why she did it, and

felt very grateful to her for giving us this chance of seeing how people did things, but I think it would have killed Kitty if she had guessed it; I was particularly glad on her account, for I thought that it would make it easier for her when she went travelling with Herbert. I knew just how she would refer to it, in talking, in that elegant way of hers, "when I was at the Springs," as if they were only one of a thousand different places that she had visited.

Herbert came up once or twice to spend the Sabbath at home with us, but it was a long journey, and he was busy preparing for his graduation in July. Kitty went down to hear him deliver his oration, for of course Herbert had an oration, — he always said he should. I begged off from going with her, although his father and mother very kindly sent me an invitation, to which he added his entreaties. I could not go, even though Kitty was so grieved about it, and it went to my heart to deny her anything.

From the time of her return until the wedding-day seemed but a step, the precious moments slipped by so quickly.

Our guests came the day before. Our house was full, with grandma, and an uncle and aunt from the West, and Mr. and Mrs. Clay. The neighbors kindly entertained others, friends of Herbert, and the groomsmen, — Gray, who was to stand with me, and Fred Austin with Kate Field. Kitty begged to dress me that last afternoon before, because she wanted me to look just as she pleased. I have sometimes thought since that she had another reason. She would make me put on a blue muslin with white polka dots, although it was rather late in the season. In vain I pleaded that it was not as new-fashioned as some of my others. She replied that it looked more like me, and begged to know when I began to be so particular about the styles. Then she took down my curls, and rearranged each one separately, till my head was heavy with pins.

My ruffles would not do; I must wear one of her new ones. And as for my jewelry, it was not the thing at all; she would bring me some from Europe that was just suited to me, and to-day I must wear flowers, — there were some roses that would be too full-blown for to-morrow. After putting me in a chair, she walked round me and took a survey, and then she made me stand up and look at myself from different points of view, "that I might gratify my taste for the beautiful." Finally, hearing Herbert come in through the garden gate, she released me, and I left her at the foot of the stairs, to join her lover, and stole away to the front gate, over which I loved to lean, with my head upon my arm, looking down the broad street. The border of grass between us and the road was wide and green, the passers-by few, and the lofty elms hung their trailing branches over the pathway, almost shutting us in from the outside world.

I was far away in a dream of the far-off

land where Kitty was going, when I was roused by the stamp of a horse's foot, and, looking up, saw some one helping Mrs. Harding out of her phaeton. I hastened to unfasten the gate and meet her, but she put me off with a hasty kiss, and turned to the one following her, whom I had not thought to notice, saying, "I have brought some one else for you to welcome to your hospitable home; here is John, just in time for the wedding."

Yes, here was John; of that fact I was painfully aware — indeed, all others seemed to have slipped from my mind. I felt the warm pressure of his hand, as he inquired about us all, but it was some minutes before I could nerve myself to look up into his face — that pleasant, manly face. I think that he noticed my agitation, for he talked on more easily than usual, without waiting for me, spoke of our beautiful trees, and of the interest with which he looked for the house of which he had heard so much while driving down the street in the stage the evening before.

Father and mother were delighted at the unexpected arrival, and even Kitty condescended to bestow a great many smiles and pleasant words upon him. Of course they must stay to tea, and spend the evening; there was such a lovely moon to light them home, and the air was as soft as June. Father had a great deal to ask about "foreign parts," and the way in which they did things there, and told Mr. Harding that he must come and stay a month with us, that he might tell us of all the wonderful things that he had seen. I was very glad that he could give Kitty some practical directions about travelling, and the things she would need. He very kindly thought of us all while he was away, and brought Kitty a beautiful wedding-gift of a set of jewelry, — the first she had ever had, — bought for herself. To father and mother he brought a very pretty clock, and for me a simple photograph. I was very glad that it was such a small thing, and that it was nothing I need wear. I presume he thought of

that, but mother was astonished that the handsomest thing was not for me.

After tea, our friends came strolling over to see us, and we all walked down to the pine grove. It had been a clear, mild, September day. The sloping hill was gay with huckleberry bushes, first to catch the autumn fires, with golden-rod, and with asters, blue and white.

The dear old flowers, they were beginning to pale a little, the sweet-fern leaves were brown, and curled a little at the edges, for we had had one slight frost; they rattled down as our dresses swept over them, and gave out a faint perfume. We all sat down on the dry pine-needles on the brow of the hill, and watched the sunset-glow very quietly. The hearts of some of us were too full for words. Kate entertained the gentlemen of the party, sending them on little trips down the bank for this and that flower and leaf, and adorned their buttonholes with them, advising them meantime what they should gather and bring to her next

morning, to adorn the house with, as she intended to make them useful. It is wonderful what some women can do with men. I was so thankful that she was there, and that father and mother had their minds so fully occupied. I think we could only have held each other's hands in blank despair, had we been alone together that last evening with Kitty.

It helped us, too, to be out under the calm, bright heavens, with the quiet, whispering trees. The crickets were chirping faintly in the grass; the ripple of the brook, as it rounded a rock in the current, came up soft, yet clear; the dim, sweet twilight brought a sense of peace and rest, even to our troubled hearts. Mother came up that night, as she had not done for several years, since her rheumatism had troubled her so, and tucked us up in bed as carefully as if it had been a winter's night. I knew how full her heart was, but she only said, "Don't talk, children; it will be a busy day to-morrow, and you'll need all the rest you

can get." Then she kissed us, and blew out the candle. The moonlight streamed in brightly over our bed. Kitty always wanted to have the curtains left up, so that she could see the moon.

Our last night together! How my heart stood still when I thought of it. Kitty held up her face for a kiss, and then we put our arms round each other, and cried a little, very softly, and I said, "Kitty, your eyes will be red to-morrow, and we won't cry any more;" so she tried to smile a little, and laid her head on my shoulder, and in a few moments was asleep. But oh, the hours were too precious for me to sleep. I lay and watched her, lying in my arms, so lovely as she was, with her dark hair thrown back, and the long, dark, curling lashes falling over her rounded cheeks. And the moon crept over, and the shadows changed, and all light was swallowed up in the cold, dark mists that shrouded the earth the hour before the dawn. Then the peace of the night passed away, and all life

seemed one black darkness. I clung closer and closer to my sister, till she struggled in her sleep. She seemed so far away, although I could feel her every heart-beat. Then the first faint light crept in, like a feeble, shivering hope, and the far-off hills grew rosy, and there was a stir of life outside, and the great, golden sun came up rejoicing: and this was Kitty's wedding-day.

CHAPTER VI.

THE bridesmaids fluttering to and fro, in and out of our room up-stairs, said that never a bride looked half so lovely as our Kitty, in her white silk and orange-blossoms, with the fleecy folds of the veil falling about her.

We had been dressing leisurely, ever since dinner, trying the steps in our new white slippers, sitting on the edges of our chairs, in our stiff ruffled skirts, while re-

fractory braids and curls were coaxed into position, running into the best chamber to look at ourselves in the long glass, and walking round each other to judge of effects. But at last it was all done, at the hour before sunset, as that was the time that Kitty had chosen.

From the window we could look down, across the garden, to the little white church, on the green beyond, and see the people clustering round the door. There was quite a crowd, for everybody in Slab City wanted to see Herbert and Kitty married. Herbert came up-stairs, pulling on his gloves, to take one look, he said, at the bride. Well, it was not worth while to refuse him.

We all went down, and they followed presently. Father, mother, and grandma stood on the piazza with the groomsmen. A few words were interchanged, and some one said it was time to go. It seemed like a dream.

Herbert was the only one who seemed to understand it all, and he started us down

the path in couples, bringing up the rear with Kitty. On we went, through the wide, sunny garden path, between beds of phlox, and gillyflowers, and mignonette, and, farther down, rows of stately hollyhocks, from whose blossoms Kitty and I had made such hosts of silken-skirted babies, and grand, freckled tiger-lilies, whose beads had so often hung in shining rows around our necks, stood up, tall and gracious, in the afternoon sunlight, and looked down upon the fair bride, who seemed passing away from their gentle influence and from her simple child-life, out into the great world, and the wider sphere of womanhood. A world of things seemed to pass before my eyes, and through my mind. I could think of, realize anything, everything but what was before me. I remember noticing that Tim had forgotten to cover the peppers, and wondering if we had enough of them stuffed to last through the next winter.

It was only when we came within the

church door, and stood for a moment, waiting for those before us to pass in, that it came upon me with overwhelming force. Kitty was going in, and when she came out it would be all different. She stood there with a quiet smile on her face, Herbert by her side, looking, oh, God! so strong and fair. Oh, what could not life be to them, in their youth, and beauty, and love. Helpful hands were arranging her train and veil about her; a moment, and she would be gone. Oh, what would I give for a last kiss from my sister! I went to her, and touched her flowers a little, and came back, and went up again, but I could not; it seemed as if the touch of her lips would take away all strength and courage from me. And then it was too late. The head couple had moved on, and they motioned to us to follow.

They all said that there had never been a wedding like it in Slab City! The bride was so beautiful, and everything so stylish. I laid by all the little remarks to tell Kitty

sometime, but to me everything was dim and confused. I remember how the golden light streamed in at the old church door, as we came out, and bathed Herbert and Kitty in its glory as they stepped down the steps, and over the bit of turf to the garden gate. We followed, after a moment, and were in our places in the parlor, when father and mother and grandma came in to salute the bride.

It was very hard for poor grandma, for weddings and funerals are, she says, as sad one as another to her; they take her back to her great loss. The tears rolled over her wrinkled cheeks, and stood like dew-drops on their faded roses, as she kissed us all round, the groomsmen even. But ah, it is a great thing to have been happy once. However terrible the after loneliness may be, the memory of a joy will still remain. God help us who may not have even that.

Kate Field was in great trouble. She said that country people did show off to such a disadvantage in company. They

did look so unused to their best clothes. Somehow dress brought out all the elbow joints, and long necks, and big ears; and then they were so jolly, and cracked so many jokes, especially at a wedding. She supposed that it would never do for a man who had been elected so unanimously as my father, to shut his doors upon his supporters; but she did wonder how we had the courage to invite our city friends; not but what she liked country folks, and loved the townspeople dearly. But she loved them too well to exhibit them, and when she was married she should invite them only, and tell her city friends that it was quite private.

Mr. Harding coming up at that moment, I told him laughingly that Miss Field had just said that she should not invite him to her wedding. She hastily disclaimed the remark, and blushingly explained. "I was just thinking," said he, "how beautiful it has all been, and how glad I was that I could be of the company. This seems to

me more like being married than any ceremony that I have ever attended. If I were not too old a bachelor to think of such things, Miss Kate, I would say that my wedding should be as nearly as possible like this, and that I would ask all my city friends down, to read, for once in their lives, a little poem in real life."

Kate laughed, and made some very complimentary speeches about his youth and privileges, to which he replied quite merrily, and turned the compliment upon her beauty and taste in arranging flowers. The rooms did look beautifully, decked with bright leaves and early autumn flowers. The stiff wooden mantels were covered with moss, and festooned with scarlet blackberry-vines, knotted up with bunches of white asters, and everything that would hold a blossom was full of the rare and fragrant ones that Herbert and Mr. Harding had brought all the way from Boston. I did not wonder that he felt so. Was he too old to be happy as he would like to be? Would

he not have time to get over loving me, and find some one else, before it was too late? If I had known him a long time ago, I could have loved him. He was one of those rare men whom you might look the world over to find, but now I could never love anybody.

We went out to supper, and what a merry supper it was, with speeches, and toasting of the happy pair, and much drinking of their healths in mother's old currant wine, made when she was married, to be used at the next wedding. But by-and-by all was over, and we took off the silken robe, and the filmy veil, and put on the mouse-colored dress which Kitty was to wear on her travels; for she and Herbert were to drive that evening to Bloomingdale, where they would take the coach next day.

At last there was no excuse for waiting. The pretty hat was tied, the dainty gloves were buttoned, and all our bridesmaid labors were over, save the duty of escorting her down, which we did in a body, and out

upon the piazza, where we were joined by a few of the company, who still lingered. One silent embrace all round, and a second one for me; we held each other's hands as we went down to the gate, where Tim was standing with our horse and buggy. Herbert kissed me, and took her from me; the girls behind ran out to throw over a slipper, and amid a chorus of good-byes they drove away.

There was silence for a moment, until father called out, "Don't forget the turn by the elm, Herbert, and be careful of old Dobbin." Then every one laughed, with a sense of relief, and there was a cheerful bustle of finding wraps; the Hardings' carriage was brought up, and the neighbors went, and we were left alone with our immediate guests.

CHAPTER VII.

I do not know how long it was after the wedding that I gave up doing anything, and lay, day after day, so weary that I could hardly turn my head on the pillow. At first, I kept around as usual, and put the house in order, and tried to help some in the light fall work. There were pickles and preserves to make, and seeds to gather, and flowers to pot, and so many things to do. We missed Kitty's quick hand. I thought that I could keep it all to myself, for I was only tired; but mother grew worried about my looks, and Mrs. Harding would come in to ask about me, and bring me nice things, daily.

She sent her son one day to take me out to her, as she was not able to come in, and they made me go. I dreaded the drive unspeakably, but could give no reason for

refusing. He said, gently, as he put me in, and drove off, "Do not mind my going about with you; our mothers are such good friends, and we shall be thrown much together. I have no sister, and you are much alone; let me do for you as a brother would, and we can enjoy a great deal."

I nodded a little, — I could not speak, — and he went on:

"You look weary; you are worn out with the excitement and labor of the wedding. Now you are not to say a word, all the way out, excepting when I ask you a question; you shall rest, and take in all the beauty of the way, for my mother will want to hear a great deal from you during the short time that you are with her."

It was very pleasant to be taken care of, and we were all alone, each of us, as he said; perhaps we might be good friends, and take a great deal of comfort yet, for of course he could never expect anything more, after what I had told him. So I did as he said, and almost the first sense of

peace and rest that I had felt all this weary time, came over me as we drove through the woods, — the dim old woods, — that were now all bare and gray. The blue sky looked very sweet and tender between the pencilled branches of the trees. It seemed strangely near, as if it had stooped down in pity toward the poor things that had been so lately stripped of their robes of rejoicing. When I am weary and desolate, I always long to go out of doors; even in the solitude of the woods and the wide fields I feel less alone. It seems as if Nature gave us more of that fellowship which is so rarely to be found even among friends, — which only comes indeed between two who are all the world to each other. I remember when I was a little child, it used to bring tears to my eyes, with a kind of thankfulness, to see the grass growing up so much taller and thicker around a stone in the mowing, to cover up its loneliness; as if nothing was left utterly uncomforted. It was like one of God's pledges for the unknown future.

I spent several days with Mrs. Harding, and we three had very cosy times together; very happy, restful times.

The twilight came early, and we would sit and talk around the fire before tea-time, as we could not have talked under any other circumstances. In the evening, Mr. Harding would read to us. He had a fine voice, and I enjoyed so much hearing things that were so new to me. Our books at home were very old; histories, mostly, and voyages, and the *Spectator*. I did not know anything of the later poets, and "Sir Charles Grandison" was almost the only novel we possessed. I had never had an opportunity before to be with any one who knew about, and had read almost, everything, and it was such a delight! I should have laid by a store of knowledge, if only I had been stronger, but, after a little while, I was so weary, that I could only lie still on my sofa, where they placed me, — not even daring to think, — for something would always come up to take me back to Kitty and

Herbert, and the great ocean that rolled between us. After this visit was over, I did not go again, for the Hardings were to return to Boston for the winter. They came and passed the last few days with us, and brought me all their books to keep for them until the next summer, and read all that I wanted to, and Mr. Harding marked a great many places for me, and sometimes wrote a little on the margin, where he thought it might help me to understand a difficult passage; and I took great pains with these places, reading them over many times, and carefully, that I might not seem unmindful of his kindness, should he ever revert to them again.

After they were gone I thought that I should have nothing to do but to read and study the books, and try to fill my mind with them, hoping, thereby, to keep down the pain in my heart, and fill the solitude that seemed to stretch around me with the new people that I learned, through them, to know. There were so many of them whom

I loved, so many that had had trouble, — almost every one. I used to think, hardly a year ago, that it was an unusual thing, but now I know that the world is full of it, and that there could hardly be a beautiful and touching tale written that was not founded upon love and sorrow. At first I kept expecting to find something different, as I went on to read many stories and poems. It seemed to me that there must be so many great things out in the world, about which men and women of different ages and nations would write. But after a while I began to see that human nature is, and always has been, the same all over the world; that the men of old, with their mighty ambitions, the women who did great deeds, were but men and women after all. It is wonderful to think of it. It makes one feel so near to all those who lived so many years ago, — the old Romans, and King Harold, and Edith, and John Alden, and Priscilla, and even the poor Indians. I wonder if Miss Root has

ever thought of it. She and I, perhaps, are not more foolish than some were.

We had frequent letters from Herbert and Kitty. Such bright and happy letters as they were. Their happiness was perfect; and they were living a life so well suited to them both, in the midst of new and strange people and things. Ah yes, it was better so; Kitty was just the one to enter into it all, and I could never have left her at home. How miserable she would have been, with all her eager longing for the world and adventures.

I was quite content, and then, too, I was older, — nearer a little to father and mother; it was all for the best. How strange that I ever could have thought differently! But, somehow, I could not get strong again. I could not feel the interest that I used to feel in things about me. They all seemed of so little worth. I could not but wonder at the pleasure that they all seemed to take in the endless routine that we called life, — every day the same things over for long years,

until we grew old and died. I longed sometimes to creep away quietly out of it all; away from my dear father and mother, away from the kind neighbors who came in with loving thoughtfulness to bring me little delicacies, and to do for me in many ways. I loved them all, but, somehow, their fresh activity jarred upon me. One Sunday I was left alone with old Hannah, and Miss Betsy, who had been with us for a week, making up some winter clothes for mother. I told them that I should like to rest. I longed to lie all alone, and look out over the fields from my window, with no one to disturb me by a word. They went down, but I suppose the kitchen was cold, for, after a few minutes, I heard Miss Betsy say, "We'll stir up the fire, and sit here, Hannah." The dining-room was just below mine, and the stove-pipe came up through the floor to warm my room. I turned over, sick at heart, for it would break the sweet silence to hear them chatting away below.

Presently a remark caught my ear: "The

doctor said he couldn't tell how long she would hold out; her ma's eldest sister went off just so; seemed to be nothing special the matter, only a losin' of strength; is in some families, they say, and comes out where you'd least expect it. It'd be a dreadful blow to Squire Trist and his wife, and Kitty. I do think they don't do right lettin' her go on so gay like, in furrin' parts, an' her sister so feeble, — she'd take it to heart greatly if she never see her again; they was allus so much together, them two girls. Pretty creeturs! I remember 'em when they warn't but little things, in pink caliker frocks, and sun-bonnets, goin' down the street to their grandma's," and Miss Betsy heaved a sigh, and leaned back and rocked in her squeaky rocking-chair.

So this was what they said of me! It came with a great shock! I repeated it over to myself, but it did not seem as if it could be I of whom they spoke. Perhaps this was an answer to my longing for rest.

Are our wishes as prayers? Would God

take me, so young? And, oh, when Kitty came back, what would she do without me! Who else would care so much for every little thing connected with her? Nothing, I was sure, would be anything to her, without me. She would lay by so many little things to tell me; she would wish that she had never left me. If I could only wait till she had had a happy coming home, I might go more easily. I thought of my father and mother, — so careful and anxious for me. Who would take care of them, — did they know this? If I could only wait and go with them! Heaven seemed lonesome and far away, for nobody that I knew, or loved very well, had died. I hardly remembered grandpa.

It seemed so strange to think of the world going on just the same, and I not in it. This poor, weary, throbbing heart of mine would be quite at rest, and all my tears would be wiped away in the "Better Land." I took my little Bible and read about it over again. When last I read, they seemed so

far away, — the "green pastures," and the "still waters," and, now, how near! Why is it that one has still the longing, in the face of all trouble and pain, to linger on till the last moment? I could not go and leave Kitty. Could I live?

We were much surprised the next evening to hear the stage stop at our door. Father was down-stairs, and mother, who was sitting with me, hastily settled her cap, and ran to the head of the stairs to listen. She came back all agitation, to say that it was Mr. Harding, and that she was afraid that the "*spare room*" was as cold as a barn. I suggested a warming-pan, and the big feather-bed, and begged her not to let me see him until the next morning; and she disappeared, "on hospitable thoughts intent."

I could hear them talking quietly below. He would ask about me, and what would they tell him? Ah, well, he would feel sorry, I knew. How strangely things go in this world! If only we could have hap-

pened to be everything to each other, how pleasant it would have been all round. But when there has been *one*, all the rest of the world is nothing, and one's heart must go as it will.

It would be very easy seeing him now, because, as all hope was gone, — as he knew I was going to die, — I need be only honest and straightforward with him. I asked mother to send Miss Betsy up with him in the morning, after I was dressed, and on the sofa, and she could leave him to talk with me a little time, while she took the opportunity to arrange matters below. I did not like father or mother to come with him, for I knew that I must have altered since the autumn, and I feared that he might show them that he noticed it. It was well that I did so, for when he came in, his face changed in a moment, and it was some time before he could speak. I held out my hand, and said: "Do not be troubled, Mr. Harding. Come and sit by me; I am so glad to see you; and I want to say a great many things to you."

So he came, and I talked to him as cheerfully as I could about his mother, and the books that they had left me. And then I asked him what he had heard about me; whether it was true that every one thought that I must die. I had no one else to ask but the home friends, and they could not have told me. He told me, very quietly, what they said, for he knew that it was better to do so: that there was no illness that was dragging me down, but that my mind preyed upon my body, and whether from exhaustion, or other causes, the strong desire of life was wanting, which alone could arrest the threatened malady, and he begged me not to give up, but to think of father and mother and Kitty, and to rouse myself, and take hold of life, putting aside, as far as possible, all memories of past pain, and looking forward, trustfully, to a life which could not fail of being a full one.

It did me a great deal of good to talk to him, he seemed to understand it all so perfectly, without my saying a single word.

He stayed on several days, for he had come to attend to some alterations to be made in his mother's room at the Springs. She was to come up early in the season.

Every day he spent an hour or two with me, and he would tell me of all the new and wonderful things that were taking place in the city; of the new books, and the pictures that he had seen. It was such a break in our everyday life. In the evenings, father and mother would join him around the open wood-fire in my room, and even old Ponto and Mrs. Pussy seemed to feel the attraction, for they would come stealing up, and ensconce themselves in the warmest corners. Only Kitty's place was vacant!

But the days flew by, and Mr. Harding was gone, and things settled down into the old way, varied only by letters from Kitty, and occasional boxes of delicacies from Boston.

One day, however, mother came up with moistened eyes, and laying a letter on my bed, went quietly away without speaking a

word. I took it up with trembling hands; it was from Herbert, with a scrap of paper inclosed, written in pencil by Kitty. A great terror came over me. Could anything have happened to her? It was some minutes before I could begin to read her feebly traced words.

"MY DEAREST SISTER, — Herbert will tell you of my severe illness, but I write to let you see how much better I am, and to say one word, — to tell you how, through it all, I thought of you, and longed to see you. Hope, dear sister, they tell me that you are not strong as you used to be. Are you doing everything that you can for yourself? Remember that if anything should happen to you while I am gone, my heart would be broken. I could not live without you to share in all my joys and sorrows. I shall not be quite well again until you tell me that you are better.

Write to me soon, and comfort the heart of your KITTY."

I do not think that I had ever doubted it, but it came over me like a warm, fresh wave of life, — the fact that Kitty needed me so much. Yes, even if she should forget me in her happiness, she would want me in her trouble and sickness. I did not think that even Herbert could do for her as I could, for a woman knows so much of the inner life than a man, through her timid, shrinking, thirsty nature, — through her great needs, — which are her teachers.

It would be a great struggle, but I must live for Kitty. I lifted my hand, and stretched it out. How weak and thin and white it was, but there might be a great deal for it to do in the future. I lifted my head, and looked around me, — out of the window, and over the fields below. Everything was very brown and bare that quiet afternoon. The snow had gone from the hills, and all Nature seemed waiting, — lifeless and empty, — for the awakening of the springtime. Only just beneath my sunny, sheltered, south window there was an old

lilac-tree, whose buds had begun to swell, and show the faintest, palest line of green between the polished, dark-red, overlapping folds, and over in the orchard I heard a lone bluebird twittering away to keep himself company.

"It is the first step that costs," Mr. Harding had said to me, quoting from a book which he had read to me. I will begin to try a little; perhaps I can keep up with the old tree; we will encourage each other. I was so busy with my thoughts that I did not know that mother had come in till I turned back, weary from the unusual effort, and met her wondering eyes. Then I put my arms around her neck, and said: "I am going to get well, mother, for I can't disappoint Kitty," and we had a good cry together.

I found that it was not alone the first step that cost, in the slow, upward way. Oh how wearily, at times, I struggled, overcome with the loneliness of life. But, little by little, the old instincts forced themselves upon me, and, as the year grew, and the

flowers blossomed, and the earth grew rich and full of good gifts, a little faint sense of comfort sprang up within my heart. The old, wild longing seemed to have been buried away from me by the same care that cut down the proud blossoms and wild luxuriance of growth that clothed the year in the last summer-time, and now a new and tender, though a feeble verdure, began to spring up and cover what had seemed so dry and bare. Not the same, oh, never more the same, but in the same likeness, and with a fair promise of bloom and beauty of its own.

As the warm summer-days came on, we had letters from the Hardings, or, rather, from Mr. Harding, for his mother was not in her usual health. She was longing, he said, for the country, and talked so much of seeing us again. The house at the Springs did not open for a month yet, and mother suggested that we should invite her to our house, to spend the intervening time.

In a few days came the answer to our

letter, accepting the invitation. Then there was quite a stir for a week, preparing things for her reception. Mother wanted a lounge covered in the spare room, and the curtains changed, and the old mahogany furniture must be rubbed till it shone.

It was a beautiful day that brought them to us. The apple-trees were covered with blossoms, and the air was full of the songs of birds. Mrs. Harding was so overcome that she could hardly speak, as she got down from the stage and looked about her. She had changed greatly since I saw her last. Mr. Harding said to me, as I stepped out upon the piazza, after taking her up-stairs to her room,—

"I see that I need not tell you of my anxiety. Had it not been for this, I should not have felt that we ought to trespass upon your parents' hospitality, while you are yet far from strong, but she longed so to come."

I did not feel that I could comfort him by what I could say, but told him what a pleasure it was to us all to do for her, and spoke

as cheerfully as I could of the effects of the bracing country air.

He shook his head, but smiled a little, and said that it, or something else, had done a great deal for me, and asked me if I had finished all the reading that he had left me last winter, which led to a little chat about all that had happened since we met.

How pleasant it was to talk with one so interested as he was in all the subjects that I loved so much. I could hardly help sighing, as we turned from the dusk and fragrance to go in-doors, and he said, regretfully, —

"While I am here this summer, we must have some pleasant rambles and long talks. I have never lived in the country, and you must show me all the hidden beauties of Nature, for you seem to know by heart all the lovely nooks in the country about here."

I thought with some alarm of the *long talks*, in which I should play so poor a part, but told him that if he would not mind carrying a basket, and wading a brook occa-

sionally, or descending deep ravines to look up certain little treasures which I had set my heart upon finding, that I would show him all that he could desire.

We settled Mrs. Harding comfortably in the great "spare-room," so cool and quiet; and she said she knew that she should sleep like a young girl, lulled by the faint sound of the brook that came stealing up through all the night, mingled with the whisper of the pines. I sat by her bedside and talked a little, quietly, to her, until she was asleep.

The apple-blossoms faded and died, and summer stole in upon us, but health and strength did not return, as we had hoped, to the invalid. She was able to come down-stairs, upon bright days, and sometimes could walk with us a little way to see the hay turned in the field, or to watch the coming-on of the flowers in the garden. Mr. Harding did not return as he intended. She begged him to stay, from day to day, and finally would not hear of his going at all. He told father that he would remain

on condition that he would make him useful, and teach him farming; and we soon found that he was quite in earnest. The straggling undergrowth which mother and I had longed to have put in order, was all trimmed and fastened up. The old syringa-bushes, which had been growing in their own way for the past twenty years, lost some of their unwieldy size, and the front-yard received so many touches that it excited the admiring notice of all the villagers.

But our attention was soon taken from these things by the appearance of more alarming symptoms in Mrs. Harding. Then came weeks of weary watching, and at last we knew that there was no hope. Toward the last there were many days when she was free from pain, and loved to have me sit and read to her. At other times she seemed to enjoy talking to me alone of her early life, her hopes and fears. One day, as I bent over her bed, she put up both hands, and drew my face down to her, and kissed it, saying, "Dear child, no one

has done for me what you have, and before I go I want to tell you something. When first I saw you, I trembled lest you should steal my son's heart from me. Something told me that you were one whom he could care for more than for any woman that he had ever seen. The thought of his marriage was like death to me, but now it is my great grief that you cannot care for him. I long to feel that he has a faithful heart to comfort him, when mine has ceased to beat. Promise me at least that you will be his friend; that you will care a little for him, for his mother's sake." Then she told me that she had begged my father and mother to keep him for a while, that his loneliness might be broken a little. He had worked hard at his profession during the winter, and was tired, and worn, and needed rest and care. And I promised to do what I could, to comfort her. After that she failed rapidly, and one beautiful evening, when Mr. Harding and I were sitting by her, she quietly closed her eyes forever.

The house seemed strangely empty when it was all over. Our time and thoughts had been so entirely occupied with her, that there seemed nothing left for any of us to do. Mr. Harding was overcome by the loss. She was his all, poor fellow, and we hardly knew what to do to comfort him.

To my surprise, he returned with father and mother, who had accompanied him to Boston, to pay the last honors to our poor friend. He said that he could not stay where all reminded him so of her. At first I was anxious lest our quiet life should be empty to him. Men are not like women, who slip quietly into the vacant places in a household, exciting no special feeling unless it be a sense of fulness and completeness; they are more like a rock thrown into the bed of a brook, — the stream must divide and flow around it whichever way it best can. I was afraid we never should get around Mr. Harding when it came down to every-day doings. But it was really wonderful, the way in which such a

manly man as he was adapted himself to our circumstances. He was devoted to mother, taking her about wherever she wanted to go, and always doing some little thing for her comfort.

Father got so that he could hardly go out to the field without taking him along to give his opinion, and we worked in the garden together, and had wonderful things to bring in daily, — berries, from the bushes that he had sent us in the fall, and choice roses, from plants that he had brought up to us at different times. Then in the quiet evenings, when we had been to the meadow to see the last load of hay brought in, or had driven the cows home through the shady lane, we would take our books and read as long as the sun lent us his light.

After the lamps were lighted, father and mother usually joined us, and Mr. Harding would read something aloud to us all, until a subdued murmur arose. and the frill of mother's cap drooped low, when we would quietly betake us to our German lesson,

which finished the evening. For he had persuaded me into reading German with him. I had always longed for an opportunity, and now availed myself of it with such eagerness that my progress surprised and delighted him. I felt that the days were few in which I could hope to go on improving; he would surely tire of us before long. But I did not like to think of it; it was so long since I had been as happy; it was more than a year since Kitty's wedding-day. That day we celebrated with a few friends, by a drive and picnic upon Kitty's favorite mountain-side. He had planned it all some time before, and had written to Kitty of the arrangement, that she might think of us at that time, and know what we were doing. I felt very grateful to him for it, for it would have been an effort to go on quietly at home as usual. He was always stepping in between us and our sad thoughts, and filling our lives with pleasant things. I wonder what we ever did before he came!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE beautiful October days came at last. Oh, what walks we had through the radiant woods! Surely the asters never showed such bright eyes, the leaves such coloring, and never hung the haze so tenderly over the distant hills. Or was it that I had never before enjoyed them all with one whose heart was so keenly alive to all their beauties, whose taste was so in accord with my own? Well might I enjoy it all. Not one regretful thought would I admit; for winter and silence were coming.

One afternoon we had been out on a long ramble. Missing a turn in the road, we came out upon the brow of a hill which overlooked all the valley below, the river shining in the distance, the little village sleeping in its embrace. There were several miles to be walked before we reached

home; the sun was yet high; "would I not rest and talk a little?" I sat down with a sigh upon the brilliant carpet of leaves. "How they have fallen! The trees are bare, the fields are empty, everything is going!"

He smiled a little sadly as he stood leaning against a tree. "Do you care so much for the poor things, that you speak in such a desolate tone. When one has those whom they love with them, the outside world matters so little. You are among your own, and I alone, of all your friends, am going away."

"Going away!" I had thought of it a thousand times; why did it strike me with such a new force when uttered by his lips? I was very tired with the long walk, and such an utterly weary, miserable feeling came over me, that I wished that I might die. The tears came rolling down my cheeks, and I could only bury my face in my hands and sob desperately.

He was kneeling by my side in a moment,

trying in every way to comfort me, but his words only made it worse. "Why, O why do you cry so? Are you sorry for me that I have no one? O Hope, if you could only take back what you said so long ago, — or no, not take it back, — I am not grieved that you have loved some one else, if only that is past, and you will love me now. I have loved you ever since I first met you, Hope, my darling; I have felt all along that we were made for each other, but I could see how it would be with you, for I am older, and perhaps too settled down, while Kitty's beloved is so young and handsome."

"Oh, no, no," I said, for perhaps Herbert's handsome face never looked less so than at that moment, in contrast to the noble one before me; "it is true that I have loved Herbert, — you must have known that; he was my hero, as a child. I shall love him always, but not in the same way. All that is past. Everything seems so different from what it did before I went away. I

have seen the world, and tasted sorrow, and now I know myself. It is as if the old Hope had died, and there was a new one come in her place, — the same, but different in many things. I could never have been Herbert's wife, for we should have grown apart; I see it all now. The world drew him one way, and me another. Kitty is just the one for him, and now that I have got over the shock of the separation, — for he had grown up into my heart and thoughts, — I am so glad; it is so much better as it is."

"And now that that love has gone from you, have you a place for a new love, or perhaps for one not altogether new? Hope, have all these hours that we have passed together in the fields and woods, and over our books, been nothing to you, — hours which to me were life, and breath, and happiness? Is it nothing to you that they are ended, and that our paths diverge?"

He spoke passionately, sorrowfully, and I answered, softly, "It has been more to

me than I have dreamed; so much, that when you spoke, just now, of going away, it came upon me with an overwhelming force, — the knowledge that my happiness, my all would go with you, and that there would be nothing left for me but to die. You have brought back, little by little, my life to me; it is in your hands to do what you will with it." This is all that I can say of our love-making. John and I have a way of our own, and we keep it very much to ourselves. I think that our old Tim has surprised us out of more of it than anybody else, going his rounds through the fields.

It was very late when we returned that night to tea, but John thought that I needed to rest a while, and, too, the bright October moon would light us home, if we waited. It was a long walk, but with a strong arm to lean upon I did not mind so much. Mother was on the steps when we arrived, peering down the road after us.

John put both arms round her, and kissed her, saying, "Congratulate me, mother,

dear," and she kissed him heartily in return, and then kissed me, while a few happy tears rolled from under her spectacles. I didn't think she would understand it all so quickly. One would have supposed that she had foreseen it all. Father and mother and John had a long talk that night, though I was sent off early. But John and I went for a drive the next morning, with "old Dobbin," and I had my turn. When we came back, it was all settled. In a month we were to be married, and then we were to go to "our house" in Boston, to remain for a week, before sailing for Europe, to join Herbert and Kitty. I could not take it all in, it was so new and surprising, and in vain I begged for more time for courting. "It was impossible," John said, "it was so late in the season. If I had only told him that I loved him in the summer, he might perhaps have allowed me six weeks. As it was, I had nothing to do but to get the wedding-dress. Kitty would have everything ready for me when I reached there. We would have but

a small wedding, and when the two brides returned, we could go into whatever festivities we pleased.

Thus it came to pass that, upon one of those glorious days that come as a special mercy after the year's bright promises seem all fulfilled, father and mother, and John and I walked down the garden-path, and over to the little church, where were gathered those who had been interested longer than we knew in our love-story. The sun shone bright and warm upon us as we stepped out upon the leaf-strewn turf, even as it had shone on Herbert and Kitty on that day, when, in the presence of so much happiness, we two had carried such heavy hearts. Our home-gathering was very small. A few of John's friends had come from Boston, "to read the little poem in real life," and these, with relatives and neighbors, were all. The old house looked very pretty, as the afternoon sunshine streamed in, and lighted up its decorations.

The bright leaves and flowers were gone, but the hardy ferns were glorious in their greenness, and every one in the village had stripped their plants of the snowy chrysanthemums for my wedding. Red berries glowed from beds of soft mosses, and some flowers had come all the way from Boston. John had insisted that I should have a real wedding-dress of shining satin, — which seemed far too grand for me, — but since he was satisfied, it mattered not.

Old Dobbin came again to the door to bear away a bride, and this time father and mother were left alone, but they and grandma were coming down in a few days to see us sail, after which they would stay and spend the winter in our house, with Kate Field to act the part of daughter.

In the quiet of our happy home we opened the trunk for "my son's wife," and shed many tears over the precious relics. How happy I felt that I had been permitted to do so much for our mother.

That evening as we sat in the twilight

before the glowing grate, John said: "I have been waiting to show my wife a certain treasure that I have carried for a long time. Lean down, Hope, a little nearer to the light." He took out a little silken case, and opened it, and within lay a faded rose.

I looked inquiringly; I had never given it to him. Was this — my voice trembled a little — "John, did you ever care for any one before you knew me?"

He smiled a little as he took my hand. "Would it grieve you very much to know that I had? This rose was worn by my first love, and — my last. She refused it to me, but a kind fate shook it from her hair as she left the carriage, and I found it when I went back to it, desolate. Now, don't cry, darling, all the past is nothing, so that I have you at last!"

THE END.

LB Ag '12

My Sister Kitty.

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